



P.F.S. POST

PHILADELPHIA FRABJOUS

From *P.F.S. Post* (2008)

THEN & NOW

I couldn't be more or less than I was then,
could I? But *like* a person, thought I could.

Standing beside the picnic table—
beside myself— mimicked hands, hello, and mouth.

Said *yessir, pleasesir, thankyou*— I watched
the boats go south. I waved goodbye, dutifully. I bore

the empty wine bottle to the basket, *shoo*-ing flies.
But all day he'd been leaning—mast and pole—

he had us cleaning the underside of the belly,
all along the bulwark and the bow. I had tools then,

didn't I? Steel wool, toothbrush, tar. Once
I tarred a roof, rewired a house. I was small;

I could fit into crevices. But only *like* a person.
I was a child: rest and enervation. I could as easily

lie down now in rows of soybeans, as against
the plaid flannel of your shirt, smelling of gasoline.

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From *Tears in the Fence* 52

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- Adam Fieled

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PLAYGROUND

These fractures are days, when
birds climb the stairs of their songs
towards plane-pierced clouds
and the additional tastes of air.

Runners guide their shadows past but
their shadows are wearing the grass.
A statement is taking shape, outside us:
something these strangers participate in.
The children in the trees, parents on their
phones holding bags full of empty picnic
things. A frisbee is describing an ellipse,
a blackbird side-steps towards a crisp.

The playground still in operation, like
a factory; its' wheels, productions.
Metals being strained, pushed,
pistons compressed and dies stamped.

So much of us is built on children's
unrecorded labors and negotiations.
Emancipation is won on the slide
but kicked back on the swings.

As a few trees raise their fists,
a cloud disperses like a crowd.

Seagulls snow-storm the playing field.
The ring-road tightens and the trees'
crown of crows lifts, and falls.

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Adam Fieled (Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, USA): from *Something Solid, The Nineties, Home*

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The hook was baited, for the fish to understand something hidden. However much Manhattan basked in the media spotlight, as the home of all cultural East Coast action, the portal-ways, planar spaces, advanced compositions, heady coloration schemes, which tumbled from her teeming head, could have no home there. Manhattan, media spotlight or not, had no recourse but to be dumb. Inauguration beneath the surface to just that, the part of life against stage-lights, but Abby simply had no choice. She was the threat to an established cultural order. No Byronic hang-ups, just a pair of the most crystalline eyes ever bequeathed to a human being, forced to leave what had been her home. Broadway,

where she had served, proved to be no help. Musical theater was third-world lechery, as was Manhattan itself, so that the fish forced herself to flow into a new, foreign city: all buildings, no Broadway. The girls who were her girls were everywhere. She hoped. And lucked out, because crafting hands molded the situation into a form sculptured to please a ferocious appetite for queer life. No queerness lacking in Philadelphia. Just the sense of a new kind of flow, sense of order, hierarchy: permissions to be granted, privileges to be earned. Always the thought that Manhattan could be retreated into. Abby found that when she bit down on Philadelphia, the planar spaces expanded themselves into something epic, unprecedented, as did a sense that compositions announced solvency. Home.

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More History of Heller-Burnham in The Seattle Star

More from Ocho #11

THE SEXUALITY OF PROLEPSIS

In a lyrical space

I do not see you

or the hysteria
of your runaway bride.

It's a Saturday, only,
it is not wartime,

& you are not appropriate
with that shouting,

hollering to-do.
I should lie, say

I dreamt about you.
Make you quiet.

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From *Ocho* #11

AS BROTHERS

Have you ever traced a silent war
across the length of your life?
Have you ever known an enemy
so frank with shattered music
you begin to love him on the sidewalk
in front of your house, searching the sky
as brothers, until it's impossible,
your eyes granite, your voice
a forged and faded signature, until one of you,
not knowing what else,
presses the gas & drives away?

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William Allegrezza (Gary, Indiana, USA): "Fragment"

four parts falling
that was how i came to see it
what's happened is
the spirits take hold
and then thrust us out into
the brilliance of a day on its end
as though only thought
can remake the system in
clean lines in frequent
violent reverberations of sound
that remind us of battles,
of hinges raised for a moment
in the sun.

© William Allegrezza 2007

Adam Fieled (editor, Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania): from *Something Solid, The Nineties*, "Defiance"

The road is slick with moisture. If they hydroplane,
you can say goodbye to my own future life. Rather
more distressingly, they're both high, as she holds on
tight. Her long, slender arms make the necessary circle
around his ample waist; long, lank blonde hair blows
in the breeze. Yet she's quiet at Penn Crest, stubbornly resistant to
attempts to draw her out. She's his girl Friday more
than wife. Real marriage hovers in the future as
a homing beacon, against the ravages of too many
deal-related parties, intermediaries imploring her
to step back, climb on his loaded lap: her one & only.
Body/soul unity haunts her waking hours, a vision
inherited from the Renaissance shakes her dope-addled brain.
Statuesque, she carries a blown-glass bowl, rolling papers.

The most formal future comrade migrates from flat to flat,
the length of Manhattan; saved from school's repetitive
rigors, yet awkward against others more normal. As is
often the New York spin, there is no getting close. Kids
come & go. She's got the pluck, as is ascertained, to paint

what she wants. The most difficult forms (portal-ways, planar spaces)
flow easily out of her. She's then a weird, worrisome windup
doll to defy the lightness of touch used to lighting up
the New York art firmament. She's a gem for someplace else,
not dust-binned yet, but close. Half-noticing, she also
imposes a posture of defiance on her life— tiny, half-dyke.
Day-to-day, the grind is to take the advanced lights, find
somewhere to migrate with them. The vision behind is crystal.
I was destined to defy the motorbike with paper piles, marriages. Right?

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The *Defiance Duo* fast-forwards together into the early Aughts in Ink Pantry

From *Seven Corners Poetry* (7C)

girls against boys

When she makes an o of her mouth,
the forsythia behind her head bursts into flame,
singes clothes-lines full of blue gingham
pinafores, yellow flowered sheets.

When she bends at the waist, she can make an o
of her body— a birdcall, a tiny pink sequin.
Can make up names for the baby teeth
beneath her dresser— *Lydia, Amelia*—
their tiny lion tin. Can define the pinwheel
of her arms falling through dark.

The trellis by the steps slicks in the rain—
all night he calls for his extra rib,
his good heart's hinge. *Sad, sad.*
No one can sleep with him. The world
is all checked cotton and charm bracelets now.
I can move my mouth in a whisper.
Could give you the instructions,
if you found the proper word.

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From *No Tell Motel*

harm

Soon, the objects nearest the house begin to crumple like bows, putting back their shapes. They sing the dead from their drawers, the white from our sheets. Soon, even the cats won't sleep. Night, a girl falling through trees. A chair fastened to the floor. Before the wreck, I wore a checked dress and talked about poison: *deux ex machina*. My hair medicinal, written. Bloodstains where he looked for me on the car seat, the white sheets. He looked for me with the kitchen knife, trampling the azaleas. The devil in me swooned in the root cellar, where I tried to keep him, couldn't feed him. He sang the town to ruins. Sewed the sky into a slit.

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Ephemera: beginning the work

Works of art function, on a cultural level, as both message-carriers and symbolic talismans. To the extent that the intentions of the artist are taken seriously, the artist him or herself becomes a message-carrier and a symbolic talisman. This is the art-function that forms the basis for the study of artists and works of art as semiology. Yet, in framing a work of art, criticism always presents a de Man-ian crisis situation, which brings to light an issue, which, unsatisfyingly, lacks objectivity, but is compellingly magnetic enough to be irresistible (to some) nonetheless. This is the issue of *perfection*. There cannot be, objectively, a *perfect* work of art, but the critical brain nonetheless may be compelled at any moment to have recourse to a perceived perfection inhering in a work of art. That criticism and crisis can be objective, a reaction to an existing situation or context, or subjectivist, a personal stream of consciousness following or developing from close, patient study of cultural products, is taken for granted. When I begin to contemplate the years I have spent studying *Ephemera*, an early poem by early Mod or Edwardian poet William Butler Yeats, I understand that the crisis latent in the poem for me was slow to materialize. But materialize it did, and now, in 2025, in the mode of crisis, the issue forces its hand. Could it be that *Ephemera* is the most perfect poem in the English language? If this is acknowledged as at least a possibility, could we extrapolate from said possibility that Yeats takes a vaunted place above the major Romantics and Milton,

superior to them in allegiance to textual intensity, dramatic sweep, and symbolic weight?

The poem itself must take the floor and speak for itself. Worth noting that *Ephemera* is not seen to be in the first tier of Yeats' oeuvre. How this is possible is simple: it lacks the representationally bardic stance which is seen, critically, to lend Yeats his largesse. The modesty in the poem, however, inhering on a surface bereft of seeming socio-historical import (often the stock-in-trade of Yeats' first tier) in favor of a small incident or situation, is balanced by a surfeit of semantic, and imagistic, gorgeousness. An apogee, as it were, of the pure and purely aesthetic. Apogee, also, suggesting the perfection bardic postures often miss:

*"Your eyes, that once were never weary of mine,
are bowed in sorrow under pendulous lids,
because our love is waning."*

And then she:

*"Although our love is waning, let us stand
by the lone border of the lake once more,
together in that hour of gentleness
when the poor, tired child, Passion, falls asleep:
how far away the stars seem, and how far
is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart!"*

*Pensive, they paced along the faded leaves,
while, slowly, he whose hand held hers replied:
"Passion has often worn our wandering hearts."*

*The woods were round them, and the yellow leaves
fell like faint meteors in the gloom, and once
a rabbit, old and lame, limped down the path;
Autumn was over him: and now they stood
on the lone border of the lake once more:
turning, he saw that she had thrust dead leaves,
gathered in silence, dewy as her eyes,
in bosom and hair.*

*"Ah, do not mourn," he said,
"that we are tired, for other loves await us;
hate on and love through unrepining hours.*

*Before us lies eternity; our souls
are love, and a continual farewell.”*

The formal component of *Ephemera* which most distinguishes itself is that it is free verse. As was the case when *Ephemera* was written (1889), perfection in English-language poetry without end-rhyme (or at least the sturdiness, strictures of blank verse) was unthinkable. Yet never, in said English language, have assonance and alliteration so accomplished the yeoman’s task of making the piece shudder, oscillate, scintillate, resonate as they do here. The third stanza (“Pensive...hearts”) is a foray into a mysticism of the English language which mirrors all the signified mysticisms in the *mise en scene*, built into the exquisitely represented landscape. Close reading, however, in the manner of the New Critics, can only take us so far here. It is enough to know that the line-by-line reality of the piece subsists on a level of extremely tautened dynamic tension. The two lovers stand, and walk, but never sit; that establishes the physiology of the poem tautened, taken care of. They also seem to inquire of the woods and the lake whether their shared assumption, of also shared obsolescence, is correct. A felt, affirmative answer closes the circular paths they walk. The dialogue could be taken as mannered. If I do not take it that way, it is because the physiological tension built into the piece renders the dialogue more potent, more raw. Physiological tension, also, missing, it might be said, in the effete languidness of *Adam’s Curse*. Which, of course, is higher placed in Yeats’ oeuvre, and bears some similarity to *Ephemera*.

The next inquiry closes our own circle back to the idea, quixotic or not, of *perfection*. The mirroring physiology of the reader most closely attuned to *Ephemera* — why is there something perfect here, in 2025? Yeats’ brief sojourn into free-verse crushes the life out of what has been written in the English language since 1889— yet the form of the piece seems beamed to him, in mystical Yeats-ian fashion, from a race whose prescience as regards 2025 was razor sharp. Yeats speaks to us now, today. *Ephemera* becomes a backwards, forwards moving warp from 1889, and the sense of a time and matter consuming warp is what reaches us, on a wavelength immaculately attired.

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The Modernity of *Ephemera* distinguishes it, too. Critical and scholarly confusion tends to place Yeats in a mélange of different, uncomfortable positions as regards

literary Modernity. Yeats is either (hesitantly, tentatively) the first true literary Modernist, or an Edwardian-cum-late Romantic. The elements of *Ephemera* which make it extraordinary, and a hinge to *perfection*— a tautened sense of physiological tension (dynamism), and a sense, also, of a new, streamlined approach to sonority in the English language, wherein free-verse can resonant or shudder as convincingly as end-rhymed material— subsist. Yet there is also, built into *Ephemera*, and adumbrating the entire twentieth century which followed from it, a sense which scholars might tend to miss, of the *cinematic*. The fractures and abrasions built into *Ephemera* mirror the fractures and abrasions built into cinematic expression, shot (or succession of shots) by shot (or succession of shots). This, complete with dialogue without end-rhyme consigning it to the dust-bin of the Mannered, the effete. *Ephemera* reads (or views) as, among other things, a short film:

*The woods were round them, and the yellow leaves
fell like faint meteors in the gloom, and once
a rabbit, old and lame, limped down the path;
Autumn was over him: and now they stood
on the lone border of the lake once more:
turning, he saw that she had thrust dead leaves,
gathered in silence, dewy as her eyes,
in bosom and hair.*

Real, live action, in real time, followed camera-style. That sense of prescience in *Ephemera*, which broadens the significations out of its Modernity past usual Modern parameters (parts rather than wholes, formal fractures rather than seamless, collage-like impulses), takes and electrifies its sense of constructed-ness with a sense of change, dynamism, vitality. In other words, this reading of Yeats says that he, at his most perfect, is triumphantly Modern. Picture-ism in the *Prelude*, especially the more memorable encounters, happens yet (blank verse not having to be a deterrent) with one-ended dynamism. In other words, Wordsworth has a dynamic reaction to something static. *The Prelude* suffers massively from the absence of the precise, perfected dynamic tension which electrifies, makes cinematic (anticipatory) *Ephemera*. Moreover, dialogue cannot be electrically charged in the *Prelude*, because there is none. Yeats configured as a late Romantic does a disservice to the idea that fracturing, in Modernity, can in fact take the form of internal *electrification* (incandescence) of elements. The jaggedness of the text is then an embedded sense that it cannot stay still within itself. The text *moves*.

Electrification creates confusion. Those who might want to dismiss *Ephemera* on account of its brevity, in defense of a twentieth century talisman like *The Waste Land*, are missing the point. The nature of *Ephemera's* twenty-six lines renders *The Waste Land*, like *Prelude*, at least a semi-moot point, owing to Eliot's caddishness,

boorishness, and lack of dynamic integrity. By dynamic integrity, I mean that there are no sequences in *The Waste Land* tautened around physiological dynamism, to compare with *Ephemera*. *The Waste Land* describes itself perfectly— it does not move. With Wordsworth on one side and Eliot on the other, Yeats is the wavelength frequency most attuned to what happened in art in the twentieth century which was worth noting. The sense that Modernity was one big move— from the wholesome to the unholy, the sanctified to the irreligious, belief to irony— is anticipated by *Ephemera* having game live action, real time, camera-style. Eliot described himself as, in the context of *The Waste Land*, *rhythmically grumbling*; Yeats does more than that. Cinema follows from Modernism as an ancillary channel, not respecting wholes, showing what they care to show, nothing less, nothing more. Why cinema is often credited with more vitality than literature in the twentieth century is that the basic principles, *magnetism* and *fascination*, are not attended to by Modernist literature to right way. If Yeats emerges, without a sense of the hesitant or the tentative, as the most advanced (whole, entire) Modernist voice, it is because his willingness to include action in poetry, leading to a perceptive response (magnetized, fascinated, led in productive circles), is more convincing in the twenty-first century than what has already been posited. The stasis of Eliot, as the most likely alternative, is signifying.

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Connecting *Ephemera* with anything after Modernism (but before what I call Neo-Romanticism) is a strain. The chiasmus between *Ephemera* and the cinema moves the piece hesitantly, delicately towards post-modernity. But the deep-seated pathos, elegiac tone, and straightforward, linear narrativity of *Ephemera* (linear narrativity not precluding innovation on other formal and thematic levels) all chafe against the sardonic, ironic, corrosive, and yet ultimately heartless heart of post-modernity. Indeed, putting *Ephemera* on the hot-seat next to ordained post-modern products is a pointless exercise. With *The Prelude* and *The Waste Land* there is a point; by *The Emperor of Ice Cream* (as illustrative), there is none. Not to mention other American junk-heaps like Black Mountain and San Francisco Renaissance. Let's skip, if we shall, to the Aughts in America, and the beginning of more action (*live* action) more germane. I have, in a manner of speaking, affixed to the many female artists of the Aughts (American stripe) to develop a new post-feministic mold or prototype they all happen to fit. There she stands before us, if you will: the *Creatrix*. As I have adumbrated the Creatrix-as-construct, and the entire formulation as a subset of Neo-Romanticism, the Creatrix feeds, as post-modernity did not (neither do multiculturalism and academic feminism), on narratives of form and passion, delivered

from stances of settled self-sufficiency. Grandstanding, proselytizing, or playing to a perceived crowd is thus eschewed. Narratives connotate stories represented in a discernible way. Form and passion remain self-explanatory. An interesting narrative, as in *Ephemera*, is then accredited with a sense of innovation. Forms rendered interestingly, also innovation. Entropy into incomprehensibility, nothing. Formless forays into the obviously anti-aesthetic, also nothing.

So, about this *live action* I have been promising. The locale happens, interestingly, to be New England, and the name of the writer is **Rebecca Hilliker**. Let's take a look at *Catch*, and discern if we might how conventional textual tactics can be made to serve innovative ends:

*The wind turns the water into an animal
and the boat rides the back of swells,
bucking wetly.
My legs absorb the push and pull,
thinking only of the fish,
sleek and dripping on the line,
neon green parachute ballooning
from its mouth.*

*I arch my back
and the rod dives.
The fish lifts, slimy as an egg,
spinning like a ballerina
on a silver thread,
its marble eye mute,
fixed on white.*

*How many times
did you find this world,
blinded, terrified?
There are hands on you
and pliers in your mouth,
metallic, blood-washed.
How many times have you waited
for the water
while everything lurches around you,
brilliant white, like the inside
of a hospital, like the underbelly
of a dream, gasping*

to break the surface
toward that cold & sudden light?

Like *Ephemera*, physiological tension or tautness makes the poem serve a visceral end of magnetism, fascination. It might also be said that magnetism and fascination in text are impossible without narrative to hook potentially engaged consciousness. This can be done with fulsome narrative, or what Roland Barthes refers to as *bits* of narrative; but the narrative sector must be filled in somehow. Why *Catch* creates an interesting chiasmus with *Ephemera*, is that in *Ephemera*, the sense of a tense, tautened physiology plays against a formal conceit: free-verse used to create aesthetic effects usually created by end-rhymes. In *Catch*, the tense, tautened physiology plays against an origin-seeking phenomenological fantasy, wherein the protagonist transubstantiates herself into animal form. A visual, rather than an aural, change. In *Ephemera*, an elegiac effect is created by two lovers parting ways, who stay discrete, do not meld. In *Catch*, a sense of disorientation or dementia is created (cinematic also, as in *The Fly*) by a lack of cognitive discretion. The protagonist has a sense of identification that brings the poem to an intense, incandescent, partially horrific crescendo. *Ephemera* remain genteel; *Catch* does not. The sense of live action that they share, shot by shot, succession by succession, connects both pieces to a textual continuum what brings texts to the brink of the sublime, when the sublime (as in Schopenhauer) is imposing, overwhelming, either gently so (Yeats) or luridly (Hilliker).

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The final wraparound of Yeats to 2025 is that there is no final wraparound. It is not for one critic, one artist to define a poet of Yeats' magnitude. It simply needs to be said that hidden in *Ephemera* is a passkey, heretofore overlooked, to a textual world now inhabitable at a high level. Why, say, twenty years ago, no one on the American landscape would have been interested, is that too many minds were focused on movements, and works-within-movements, that would be precluded from having long-term impact or potential. No one wanted to say, in Amer-Indie in 2005, that the emperor was wearing no clothes, in many then-prominent directions. In 2025, we are less coy. Time, as ever, is an avenger, taking spurious textual mountains and chopping them down. If you can say there is any redeeming value or noblesse oblige in holding down the fort for obvious nonsense and self-demolishing babble, it is only that the American academy at large, and the American literary establishment, is still afraid of the sense of classicism, imaginative expansiveness, and semantic interest which must inhere in poetry which could endure not only here, but from here to the

Continent, as well. This is an ultimate question to reckon, which takes the bright beginning of *Jacket* in the Aughts and extends it indefinitely— when there is American poetry ambitious enough to go Continental in a major way, what route will it take to get there? How long will the journey be?

And back to Yeats. Why the Yeats version, as this critic sees it, of Modernism— not afraid to employ narrative to generate magnetism and fascination, but also able to innovate towards revelations not just of visceral urgency and symbolic heft but of gracefulness, beauty, *perfection*— deserves its place next to other narratives of Modernism and the Modern, is that too much other Modern work is, however innovative, too imperfect. Anti-aesthetic. Banal. Suggestive to too many writers that the emperor is wearing no clothes, and that the avant-garde in America is compelled to bow down to false idols. That this is a clarion call to *conservatism*, or to embrace *conservatism*, is a true *bete noir* in the mix. That we withstand less and less being offered under pretenses of innovation, under the threat that the impulse towards wholesomeness, aesthetic well-roundedness, and the pursuit of a beauty itself is a conservative impulse— oh what a *scarecrow* it is!

Yeats and *Ephemer*a beckon from a place wherein things are what they are. The *major* is really the *major*, and not secretly something else, and the minor, the reductive, the *untalented*, generates no idols to bow down before. All this is Neo-Romantic rhetoric. The same way that Becky Hilliker's *Catch* is its own kind of (Neo-Romantic, post-feminist) rhetoric about what contemporary, major poetry in the English language might look like, unconstrained by the false modesty of its being seen through post-modern, multi-cultural, or academic feminist filters or lenses. The way-station that was *post-avant* served its purpose twenty years ago— to demonstrate an abrasion, a rupture (just like *Catch* is a rupture or crisis for our moment in the Twenties), against the Amer-Indie status quo. Now, the sense that Yeats may be the Mod of choice for Neo-Romanticism can move an enterprise forward which wants to involve, not only England and Australia like *Jacket*, but France and Germany, too. To offer our wares in the land of Kant, particularly, is to *get real* on a new level, and demonstrate consonance with pushing up not down.

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From *Seven Corners Poetry*

LIKE THE DEVIL

He holds on to life with his teeth,
dangles it by the nape.

Tastes with the fury of cayenne,
says *hush-hush-hush*
with his hands as he drinks
wine from me like an open spoon.
He can tell magenta from maroon.
He grins like the devil,
all jump-start & red bell
pepper. Stitches me together
as if my cunt is a wound,
his tongue, copacetic.
I mend, sprout wings,
scream things.
A firebird possessed
of the power to fly,
he shuts his eyes,
wills it so.
Off he goes.
Grunt & scruff, this
spitfire, hellcat—
a scrapper who turns the screws
of my truss rod, straightens
my back. Names the stars
of my knees with one eye
closed, opens my gates,
faces the bull.
Olé! He's muy caliente.
Itch, bitch, & boil,
he celebrates supine
& sublime. Pins
the tail on the donkey
every time, this toreador.
A necromantic lynx who
swallows whole but plays
legato, in tune.
He follows me out of rooms.
Hush-hush-hush.
It will be all right.
He who holds on to life with his teeth
will never go hungry.
Faster, pussycat.

Kill! Kill!

© Brandi Homan 2006

From Sharkforum

TROUBLE

The girls you love make beautiful suicides,
breaking off heels, losing orchid
corsages beneath backseats of Buicks.

This one speaks through the curtain
of her hair— the sweet blonde number,
soft machine of her ribs humming,

an engine block full of bees.

The dark has too much rigging. The moon,
projected on a screen with tinfoil stars,

is full of holes. Bankrupt gas stations,
the backs of women's calves.

Your flares set fire to the homecoming float,

the gym and all its paper carnations—
mouths gone metallic pink
harbor tire irons, rhinestone tiaras.

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From Caffeine Destiny

THE PAPER HOUSE

At the edge of the field, we see the angriest bodies.

The spell is in the wrists, the shampoo— girls with long throats and a penchant for
divining rods. In the end, the house burns beneath the moon opening like a mouth

torn out of a book. All our rooms have wants, *our* wants— broken doors. We smolder beneath dresses, our buttons, our brocade dark. Even now, the mice shred newspapers in attics filled with cages ripped from hooks in parlor walls, in parlors ripped from a woman's skin, all eyelets and hooks.

At the edge of the field, we watch with matches in our skirts.

© Kristy Bowen 2006

Elucidating Derrida and Differance: Lecture given at Temple University

“We provisionally give the name “difference” to this sameness which is not identical.”

Derrida's concept “differance” has its basis in contradiction. What Derrida is essentially “doing,” though he might balk at the notion that formulating “differance” could be “doing” anything, is moving Saussure's theories of language into an expanded realm, that might be said to include the ontological, or the metaphysical, or both (or neither.) As we remember, Saussure, in founding Structuralism with his *Course in General Linguistics*, posited that “in languages there are only differences,” i.e. all phonemes and other elements of language take their identity from all other phonemes and language elements, and are defined relationally rather than individually. Derrida is telling us that in naming “differance” through a displacement of “e” to “a”, he is, among other things, broadening the parameters of Saussure's insight beyond language and linguistic signs. The play of differences, Derrida tells us, is operational in every human sphere, and in all situations in which entities/substances/essences are perceived or intuited. All things are perceived and identified through the principle of “difference,” i.e. all things take their meaning (in the broadest sense) from other things from which they differ. By taking Saussure's theory out of linguistics and casting it in a more expansive light, Derrida posits a “relative universe” in which individual identity, as “owned” by a constitutive and constituting subject, becomes problematic as it is seen that identity is structured out of “difference,” plays of difference.

Derrida's use of the word “provisionally” is important. It signifies a temporary condition, an impermanent usage. This sets Derrida apart from earlier philosophers, like Nietzsche and Heidegger, who were much more definite and authoritative in their pronouncements. The conditions by which post-Structural thought was created entailed a radical rethinking of writing, the author, authority, and “privilege,” so that once the individual, with his/her constitutive ego, was reduced by “differance”

to a sort of “liminal limbo,” the act of writing, creating signs, and setting forth a specific “play of differences” became fraught with all sorts of complications and limitations that made every claim “provisional.” If not just language but people exist in a “play of differences”, and if this state is marked out by a permanent condition of “difference,” then how can any given “person” (and person does, in this context, need quotation marks) claim to use linguistic signs with authority? “Differance” is operative on people, and on language too, so that when a person attempts to use language instrumentally, a “double bind” inevitably and invariably arises. Even naming this bind is a double bind, or maybe a triple bind; the constitutive subject, the linguistic sign, and the anti-concept/anti-word “differance” all chafe against an attempted “stranglehold by definition” in linguistic signage. Thus, the language of qualification becomes imperative. Derrida cannot strangle “differance” into submission; it is too evanescent, too ungraspable; he must talk “around” it, and everything he says must be qualified and guarded against facile usage that guarantees misunderstanding. In fact, any claim to completely grasp “differance” would, to Derrida, seem fraudulent, because there is nothing to grasp, or a mere phantom. “Differance” exists, or has its being, or its “charged non-existence,” in a crepuscular wilderness of shadows. If Derrida is to use language instrumentally, his strategy (and Derrida emphasizes in this article the importance of strategy and risk when dealing with “differance”) must be equivocation. It is not that “differance” is ineffable, but that once it is signified, it ceases to be visible. To use a quote from Wittgenstein, it cannot be “said,” it may only, possibly, be “shown.” Although, to be fair, it cannot really be shown either, as it may lie beyond our capacity for understanding. Thus, equivocation becomes the only means by which Derrida can avoid falling into the traps of authoritatively secure language, which is seen, ultimately, to be anything but secure. Equivocation is also the best way to deal with a “sameness which is not identical,” i.e. a process and a quality that are omnipresent where being, beings, and forms of communication persist, but which takes its expression through both the individual properties of any given entity and properties (or concepts or signs) shared between entities.

“Differance is neither a word nor a concept.”

This gets to the heart of the matter, and, revealingly, the heart of the matter turns out to be a negative proposition. A fundamental duality within “differance” reveals itself, in that Derrida has created a word which he claims is not a word. Either this is a rhetorical sleight-of-hand, or Derrida is once again equivocating against authorial authority, his own constitutive subject-ness, and the signifying confines of language perpetually caught in a synchronic (and, for many readers, hermeneutic) circle. If nothing else, Derrida can be said to be consciously moving a piece on Saussure’s chess-board. It might even be more accurate to say that he is stealing a piece, and

in fact Derrida does at one point in this article use the analogy of a king about to be killed. “Differance” is seen to be not a word because Derrida posits “differance” as what happens *between* words. That is, “differance” is the play of differences by which words and phonemes define themselves, but because it is impossible to define this “play” without tautologically referring back to it, “differance,” in the negative space where it finds its definition, cannot be signified. Yet, for Derrida to lay this particular card on the table, it *must* be signified. We see that Derrida is playing the “sign-game” with the not-fortuitous and irrevocable knowledge that no victory is possible. If “differance” had to be defined and given “entity-status,” we would call it a “negative entity.” Just as words, things, and people cannot exist or subsist without other words, things, and people, “differance” has no positive existence (or Derrida might say, no existence at all) outside the context of a world inhabited by contingencies and contingent beings. Were Derrida to authoritatively call “differance” a word, he would be claiming for it the kind of pawn-on-the-chessboard existence that Saussure posits for words within his schema of the word-as-sign.

Saussure, we remember, claims that words consist of the signifier, a sound image, and the signified, a concept. Once “differance” leaves the negative space where it belongs and becomes a sound-image, among thousands of other sound-images, it is no longer “differance.” “Differance” itself, as a sound-image, becomes something on which “differance” acts, from a place outside of “differance.” As nothing can act on itself from outside of itself, this is a logical absurdity. Derrida feels doubly absurd about this, as he is the one forcing “differance” to act on “differance” from outside itself, by naming it. So, Derrida only feels comfortable in the authoritative role when he puts forth something he knows is contradictory, and, possibly, absurd.

Were Derrida a strict Saussurian and nothing else, he might feel settled about positing “concept status” for “differance.” After all, an unnamed concept that is “talked around” still might avoid the play of differences that Saussure enumerates in language. However, because Derrida is not merely following Saussure’s precepts but radically extending them, and because this extension takes Saussure’s claims for language and applies them to many other things, we see that differance-as-concept is no more or less absurd than differance-as-sign. Derrida sees that concepts, like linguistic signs, are acted upon by differance, defined by what they have or lack in relation to other concepts. If differance were a concept, we would again see the logical absurdity of differance acting on differance from outside itself. Thus, on a theoretical level (differance-as-concept), as well as on a material one (differance-as-sign), Derrida is forced by the difficulty of his construct to hedge bets. Differance must be both a sound-image and a concept, and a non-sound-image and a non-concept. In both states of being, positive and negative, differance has no identity other than that of a differentiating phantom.

“Differance indicates closure of presence, effected in functioning of traces.”

Things present themselves to us, generally and initially, as discrete totalities. If we read a poem by Baudelaire, we (hopefully) focus our attention on it, to the exclusion of all other things. The poem grips us as we gradually apprehend its totality. We might read it once, twice, or three times. It is present to us, becomes our present moment within a surfeit of our attention. During this time-period, we do not think relationally about the poem. It is simply there, in front of us, a series of linguistic signs conspiring to present an impression of discreet totality-within-presence. However, the discreet totality of a poem by Baudelaire, or any work of art, or anything that rivets our attention, is eventually and inevitably mediated by differance. “Differance” indicates the “closure of presence” because when it begins to infiltrate our perceptions, we notice “traces,” parts of whatever we happen to be perceiving, which remind us that the perceived totality of our object is in fact an illusion, and that what we perceive exists, as all things do, only relationally. If we happen to be reading a poem, we think of other poems, other poets, other times we have seen words used in the poem in other places, etc. Once this process begins, our object ceases to be “present” to us, and the energy that constitutes “present encounters” dissipates and diffuses. “Traces” are important for Derrida because they are a constant reminder of “difference,” and that “presence” as such is easily closed in a relational, differentially-aware consciousness. “Traces” are perceived differently by different people, but the process by which traces “close presence” (i.e. the way we notice traces of things in other things, traces of words in other words, etc.) is consistent.

Simply put, we do not perceive things individually. Everything that is perceived by us leads us to perceptions that mediate initial impressions, which continue to be mediated for as long as we perceive a given object. The process of mediation is internal, and means that when it begins (and it begins almost immediately), the object perceived is no longer wholly present to us. “Differance” thus distorts (though a less pejorative term like “mediates” might do just as well) our contact with things, diffuses our ability to focus. When we are not “present” for the objects we perceive, when “traces” lead us to think relationally about objects, we have entered the “ghost-world” wherein “differance” exerts sovereign influence and where subjectivity is lost in shadows. It leads us out of the present, and we see that when Derrida brings in a spatio-temporal dimension to the discussion of “difference,” this is partly where he is leading us. For Derrida, “differance” places things in time, because where we are in time has to do with our “relational state,” how we are placed in relation to other things, how we and the world around us are “sequenced.”

“Signification: differance of temporalizing”

In this way, Derrida demonstrates that signification is a way of creating a sense of time passing. When we talk, we talk “in time,” as a way of “marking time,” i.e. summarizing “states of affairs” as they exist in a moment, or, depending on the context, many moments. We are able to demarcate, with linguistic signs, what “now” is and consists of, what “then” was and consisted of, etc. It is primarily through language, and other forms of signification, Derrida argues, that we are able to do this. Things that we place with linguistic signs are always placed “in time,” so to speak, and so the play of differences as they exist between moments are expressed in language. Again, a “meta” dimension creeps into Derrida’s thinking; the constitutive subject, the dialect, and the moment being expressed are subject to “differance” simultaneously and on both similar and different levels; thus, our attempts to place states of affairs in time are mediated by the play of differences in language and in the constitutive subject as well. Every human utterance is “timed”; it takes a certain amount of forethought to plan and a certain amount of time to say or write. What is expressed in speaking or writing is the creation of a moment among moments, a statement among statements, possibly a summation among summations. There is no way to escape the relativity and contingency of a world bound every which way by differance. Now that Saussure has been moved out of the confines of language and into the broader realities of space and time, we see that “in language there are only differences” might become “in the world of perceptible reality there are only differences.” If this is acknowledged and accepted as fact, it is easy to see why post-Structuralism and Deconstructionism would argue against the belief in the reality of a discreet, closed, unmediated subjectivity.

On the other hand, the very act of “accepting” a philosophical precept as fact becomes in and of itself problematic. Facts are closed entities, or are held as such by the constitutive subject. “Differance”, ghost though it may be, seems to open things up so that the very act of accepting it as a fact, or even calling it “it,” would belie Derrida’s intention. Because Derrida must equivocate, because “differance” is seen to be neither a word nor a concept, Derrida might’ve known that “intention”, as such, did not apply to his concept. “Intention” implies the kind of constitutive, authoritative self-hood that Derrida is negating. It is an irony that “differance” seems to have been no less confounding to its creator than it remains to us today. This probably accounts for Derrida’s admission in this piece that differance is a “difficult, confusing” concept. If in the perceptible world there are only differences, and if this applies to language as part of the perceptible world, and also to any constitutive subject, we are forced to recognize the nothingness, or near-nothingness, of human perception and hence human will. “Differance” may be seen as a ghost or a kind of haunting, a binding which no one and nothing can undo. On the other hand, a more positive reading of “differance” might say that it is a mode of spiritual development, of getting beyond the confines of ego and subjectivity and

into a more realistic realm, albeit one mediated by a ghost. It would be nice to conclude with a definitive statement, but that would seem inappropriate to this text. All that remains is to place this moment in time through language, and so, with apologies for any authoritative utterance, I end here.

Adam Fieled, October 16, 2006

From Tears in the Fence 60

MISTER RIGHT

I do my bit with ruffled peonies,
water them right, their pink Asian tumbles,
thinking of you Bill and your deepening
into compassion, distinctly London
picked up experience, capital affairs

pulled from the West End's generic corral
of edge-walkers, what you called sensitives,
same-sex attracted, non-scene, soft movers
who came by you, we meet the ones we need,
by accident in 12 million stressed lives

surfacing out the tube atlas each day.
I never knew you get character wrong
in terms of seeing hurt as signature
to being special, like shyness rewrites
a hidden kindness, and these spilled peonies

get coaxed into pink focus by the sun.
To me, first meeting, you were Mister Right,
the city in you like an investment
in transitioning decades, earlier
we'd have been lovers, later we were friends

who loved each other, optimized shared time
through every illness driven in your cells
as undercover guerilla attack,
pushing sympathies forward— what was it

a favorite oatmeal jumper you wished back?

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From *Otoliths*

STREET, VASE, TIDE

The vase with peonies was struggling on the edge of the table
eyed by a cat and surrounded by words percolating in hands
and in the exhausted mind of the lady collapsed on the couch.
Burgundy with swirls, cotton— the feel of the space not captured where
again— she heard her sharecropper mum— *stay strong, hold on,*
for the streets are not friendly and the flowers fade.

The hideous statue opposite hers is now falling— dust on too many ashes.
Her vision lands and falls, bobbing on light waves alone
as the toppled colonizer bobs on waves of protests
and voices sprayed on country walls as time.
As the flowers resign, those 20 shots ricochet in her
ear memory like sinuous tides stretched inland.

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P.F.S. POST

PHILADELPHIA FRABJOUS

For November

LINES: THIS LIVING HAND

This living hand, now warm and capable
of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
and in the icy silence of the tomb,
so haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
that thou wouldst wish thine own heart dry of blood
so in my veins red life might stream again,
and thou be conscience-calmed— see, here it is—
I hold it towards you.

© John Keats 1820

Adam Fieled (editor, Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, USA): from *Something Solid: Miscellaneous Sonnets: Frequencies*

for Mary Walker Graham

I.
“We’re at our most bestial when threatened not
with hatred but indifference; what our blood wants
is reaction of some kind.” New Hampshire night,
our own reaction, you pliant, penetrable, laid out beneath me as
flies fidgeted our room, pirouetted moist air. Yet
we sank beneath bestiality to do just what indifferently
we wanted, beneath our glut of blood, so the summoned
beasts might react with this: ripped limb from limb,
buried in low-lying Virginia swamp marsh, given what

Editor:

- Adam Fieled

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aphorism is only got in extinction, darling, as I quote
what you said at the bar before. In other words, they
hated us. The one-night stand wouldn't matter if your
brain didn't have the right words in it: stories, sequences,
slammed-down metaphors of a singed self. Frequencies.

II.

As the world between her legs tightened around
her, what she saw in bed with me was stark: okra,
stamens, roots, all that in nature coalesces in erect
growth; and a shadow father bent, then erect, then
bent again, perverse from amassing wealth in a world
whose submissiveness poisons him. Beneath the sultry,
wooded surface, what I saw was a semi-frightened
animal, along for an all-night ride (gruesomeness of
4 a.m. New Hampshire sun), knife thusly thrusting
into the backs of everyone around her, managing
to have stamina enough against constraint to take
what she was taking. The mattress thumped: above,
an angel was unable to conceal laughter, understanding
it was all in the script, including the garish sun's leer.

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From American Writing: A Magazine

OCTOBER

These edges
do not chafe.
They flake in my fist.

Even the yellow leaves
have turned to dust beneath the moon,
and like a ghost
that cannot forget,
the oak is tinged

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with shadow.

What remains
but a skein of poplars,
like a scar against
the east, and smoke
unpeeling, fragrant
from burnings. I spurn
illusions.

Pools
darken the earth,
before frost
cracks and blackens.

I cover myself.

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From Tears in the Fence

THIS IS WHAT THE KID SAID

I am random and barren, swift in the city,
rodent-vermin, summer visitor full of grit
and grind but searching for her to command
me, to royal me, blame me for her alarms.
I am able to do this because she bursts,
uninjured, uninjuring, with a thirst
for unblemished lines, words that bloom all year,
unlike my own that I shed like milk teeth.
I need a challenge, to scour my clarinet,
Issue myself a dozen writs of calumny,
spin her wits on my razor, my bill, the yoke
that broke the day she threw me like a fish, back
into the geyser, all for a bottle of sounds,
of restful refrains, and powder for drying wounds.

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P.F.S. POST

PHILADELPHIA FRABJOUS

P.F.S. : *Sex and Shadows*

Editor:

- Adam Fieled

The poems I would like to explore belong to Boston's Mary Walker Graham. Many of Graham's poems adopt the tonal posture that the protagonist is either a violated

victim, or is caught in the throes of self-castigation; veer, also, towards the straight Confessional, but always with an added dimension and depth (imaginative capacity), which places her (to my eyes) squarely within the confines of post-avant. The textual edge being coasted along explores the idea that women in poetry should develop the right to plumb the depths of sexuality all the way through, thus fulfilling the archetypal promise of the Creatrix. This, against the confines of the avant-garde – specifically, post-modernity, multi-culturalism, and academic feminism – which tend to cramp expressions of sex and sexuality, and establish chaste sexual models. The following is a prose poem, entitled *A Pit, A Broken Jaw, A Fever*:

When I say pit, I'm thinking of a peach's. As in James and the Giant, as in: the night has many things for a girl to imagine. The way the flesh of the peach can never be extricated, but clings – the fingers follow the juice. The tongue proceeds along the groove. Dark peach: become a night cavern – an ocean's inside us – a balloon for traveling over. When I said galleons of strong arms without heads, I meant natives, ancient. I meant it takes me a long time to get past the hands of men; I can barely get to their elbows. How a twin bed can become an anchor. How a balloon floating up the stairwell can become a person. Across the sea of the hallway then, I floated. I hung to the fluorescent fixtures in the bathroom, I saw a decapitated head on the toilet. I'll do anything to keep from going in there. I only find the magazines under the mattress, the Vaseline in the headboard cabinet. A thought so hot you can't touch it. A pit. A broken jaw. A fever.

This poem oozes creepiness. Among the aspects I find most notable: the way that Graham's protagonist self-infantilizes (regarding herself not as a woman but as a "girl"), the imagery that conflates the sexual with the horrific (Vaseline butting against a decapitated head, broken jaws, fevers), and the intimation that what is at

- P.F.S. : The Disfiguring Gaze
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the heart of this confrontation is some sort of compulsive relationship. Yet the poem is intriguing because, despite its intimations, it never abandons the first-person singular. Whomever the "you" happens to be, we never see them, they are never addressed, and the poem posits no "Other." There is solipsism at work, which cuts the implied "you" down to size; the narrator may be involved in an unhealthy relationship, but the primary feeling we get is one of self-loathing and self-disgust, expressed with compelling (and disturbing) intensity. The generalized phrases, addressed to men, serve to illustrate, as is Graham's wont, the narrator's alienation from whatever specific man is sewn into the situation, interior and exterior. All move forward from a sense of entitlement-in-text to enact scenes from the depths of the female sexual interior.

Indeed: everything about the subject's relationship, both to coitus and to responses to coitus, is posited along axis structures of attraction and repulsion, a push-pull edge that narrativizes how the subject experiences passion. That the affect emanation is dark and dour also creates an axis of attraction and repulsion for the reader, who may choose to engage or disengage, based on temperament, and the principle of fascination, sexual and/or textual, being stimulated or not. Form vacillates between poetry and prose, strictures and freedom, uneasily.

There is also an unlikely quality to Graham's metaphors: what exactly could "balloon" imply, in this context? How can it be connected to the "peach" that Graham puts it up against? At one point, Graham creates a metaphoric chain, all meant to represent the same thing: dark peach, night cavern, ocean, balloon. The most obvious interpretation is that the metaphor is meant to signify the female sexual organ. However, the metaphoric chain is distorted, phantasmagoric, and macabre. A stretch is required to allow the metaphoric chain to work, just as Graham stretches to convey what she wants to convey, which is equally brutal and surreal, and supports a consistent persona. The following poem, *Double*, first appeared in *Ocho #11*, and works an analogous angle:

*Here is a box of fish marked tragedy.
Is it different from the dream*

*in which your alter ego kills the girl?
You are the same, and everyone knows it,*

*whether tracing the delicate lip of the oyster shell,
or sharpening your blade in the train car.*

*The marvelous glint is the same.
Though you think you sleep, you wake*

*and walk into the hospital, fingering
each instrument, opening each case with care.*

*The scales fall away with a scraping motion.
You are the surgeon and you are the girl.*

*Whether you lie like feathers on the pavement,
or coolly pocket your equipment, and walk away...*

*You are the same; and you are the same.
You only sleep to enter the luminous cave.*

I do not think it would be an exaggeration to say that this poem places itself in an introspective realm of infantile sexuality. Yet that it is written from an adult perspective gives it a kind of double edge. If there is terror here, it is terror of the protagonist's own sexual power. The interest and pleasure for the reader is in trying to understand the different levels of self-evaluation that are going on, and how they affix to the narrator's sense of herself— how her persona, made tactile, is constructed. As in *A Pit*, there is a level of sexual solipsism inhering in the protagonist which becomes a maze, in and of itself. There is also a level on which the poem exteriorizes its own discomfort through the use of "gross" imagery: box(es) of fish, blades, surgeons. What is the nature of the operation? What necessitates it?

Reversing *A Pit*, the poem is given added depth because it is presented in the second person: not "I" but "you." It takes on the quality of a narrator talking to herself about herself, and makes the poem an exercise in imaginative self-consciousness, more so than *A Pit*. I find this admirable because it recuperates the tone of Confessional poetry, yet puts it through a new, more full-bodied, if brutish, kind of synesthetic light filter. What Graham sees as "Double" could be a split between her body and her mind, or between her sexuality and her intellect, or even between herself and another. Whatever it is, it has left her in pieces, and the poem seems to be an attempt, assuming textual entitlement, to reassemble herself. Both of these poems, and other Graham work, present a consistent persona, a tangent to Stacy Blair's: a **polymorphously perverse girl-woman lost in the never-land of her own body** (and polymorphously perverse can imply a body of thoughts and ideas in addition to the mere physical mechanism.) Though possibly mainstream-consonant, as has been duly noted, through usage of conventional narrative techniques, and exploration of familiar emotions, it would be difficult to get more edgy, in the parlance of this discourse around post-avant, than that. Like painter Jenny Kanzler, Graham torques

the Creatrix archetype in on itself, so that narratives of passion become narratives of purgation, yogic exercises to make metaphors.

.....

With Stacy Blair, a Midwestern poetess, there is more to see and say about the pertinent issues hewn into these texts— the creation of a new kind of female persona in American poetry; a new, more thoroughgoing approach to female sexuality and the female body; and a continuing, obsessive interest in the dark or shaded portion of both sexual and human reality. Stacy Blair's insignia piece is called *Photo Experiments*:

*Blonde locks jut out over the tops of pigtails,
bleached beach/sand-color by the sun.
Time's short between this photograph and my regard.
Picture: no flower lays or shoes, just
young grass hips. She is, I am, we were,
very young. The entire page of this album
flanks history; under my mind, another
helpless time explosion. I was, we were, are,
naked newborn, as our little limbs on film.*

What might strike the reader as most urgent thematically— the artful insinuation of pregnancy— is buttressed by the same strain of self-castigation, self-reproach, and self-mistrust we find in Graham. Like Graham, "young grass hips," "flanks," and "flower lays" are all heavy innuendo about carnality. What makes the poem so fascinating are the divisions and precisions Blair incises into her perceptions of identity— who she was, who she is now as two distinct selves; who she is and who her assumed lover is, also as two distinct selves; and the third entity they create together (possibly the unborn child) being distinct from them as another gestalt entity. It is difficult not to read "helpless time explosion" specifically as a reference to pregnancy— and equally gripping, because addressed, text-wise, with taut, terse authority. The phrase narrativizes, also, the attraction/repulsion dynamic at the heart of issues being explored, and/or processed through purgation. The body's helplessness redeems itself in the yogic tension-release incised into fulfilled textuality. Caesuras here create a sense of hypnosis for the reader, brief incantation become a formal edge. The poem ends in irresolution, purposefully— and the chiaroscuro edge (or edges) of what I called post-avant many years ago is very much in effect, on display. Why the Aughts created this sense of dread, of foreboding, along with the shadowy seductiveness of stark eroticism, is anyone's guess; a

reaction, perhaps, to the stunted quality of the female body (and the female brain in response) in century XX art?

.....

For **Becky Hilliker**, narrativization opens a vista slightly more expansive than for Graham and Blair. Her insignia poem *Catch* takes the tropes of both the broadly sexual and the construction-of-persona from the sexual and makes significations resonate towards something, plumbed depths, more primordial, about essence and disappearance:

*The wind turns the water into an animal
& the boat rides the back of swells,
bucking wetly.
My legs absorb the push & pull,
thinking only of the fish,
sleek & dripping on the line,
neon green parachute ballooning
from its mouth.*

*I arch my back
& the rod dives.
The fish lifts, slimy as an egg,
spinning like a ballerina
on a silver thread,
its marble eye mute,
fixed on white.*

*How many times
did you find this world,
blinded, terrified?
There are hands on you
& pliers in your mouth,
metallic, blood-washed.
How many times have you waited
for the water
while everything lurches around you,
brilliant white, like the inside
of a hospital, like the underbelly
of a dream, gasping
to break the surface*

toward that cold & sudden light?

Like Mary Walker Graham, the yogic affecting of catharsis through sexualization of metaphor and imagery is prominent. Phrases like “bucking wetly,” “I arch my back,” “the rod dives,” all generate the impression that Graham is present as a companion and influence (both poetesses are affiliated with Boston). However, the final stanza finds Hilliker taking Creatrix energy to a sense of metaphoric identification, past the strictly sexual. Hilliker transubstantiates into a sense of becoming her own “Catch,” and both the chain of similes and resolution that develop from this textually enact themselves in a fevered narrativization of original passion, passion being born. Death/birth, as a dynamic, is assayed as the poetess’s seminal passion manifests from a vision of her own death-throes. The phenomenological non-constraint of no-boundaries register’s Hilliker’s consciousness a possessed one, as inside/outside tactile realities merge seamlessly in language hurled from the inside of one movement, one thrust, one ejaculation.

Indeed, the sense of textual crescendo built into *Catch* is admirable. It takes significations which for the reader could remain static and whirls them around into a dynamic context. Moreover, because the crescendo is built from the portion of the piece, past sexuality, into the idea of the original, the generative, and the ultimate similarity of birth and death (as yogic exercises involve generation and release of tensions from wellsprings of birth/death energies in the body), Hilliker employs sexualized imagery to dig deeper, into the phenomenology of origins, than Graham does. Hilliker is her own prey— which is to say, she registers herself, as a construct, originating from a double, a second form, of what could be taken as something homely she sees before her. That narrative of form built into *Catch* is about a textual reality more clipped, terse, staccato than Graham and Blair. The sense that the poem harnesses its resources towards a blinding sense of linguistic release at its conclusion, in a parallel structure with two similes (“like the inside/ of a hospital,” “like the underbelly/of a dream”), makes it a more tense, herky-jerky, less steady ride than most of Mary Walker Graham’s material. A matter of aesthetic preference, whether the measured quality of Graham’s prosody or Hilliker’s leaps and jolts generate pleasure, fascination. Even if it is dark-toned music.

On a general note: there is nothing new, necessarily, about narratives of form and passion. If the congeries of elements which make up that signification now deserve emphasis, around the idea of the Creatrix, it is because the Aughts saw the development, in the United States, of a number of female artists for whom form and passion were absolutely relevant. This, rather than a conceptual or theoretical bias, drawn from political or feminist ideologies, or assaying of cultural critiques. Neo-Romanticism, as I define it, and as is seen in Graham, Blair, and Hilliker, takes its

roots in the consciousness of the individual. The development of individual and individualized concerns, perceptions, even neuroses, then constitutes the progress towards the enlightenment of engaged artistic expression. If this is all true, what the States has seen from post-modernity, multi-culturalism, and academic feminism, become inadequate to address the concerns of poets like Graham, Blair, and Hilliker. A new set of terms, and theoretical framework, is needed.

From *X-Peri*

IF, AS HEIDEGGER SAYS,

Language is the house of being, where
do we put the mimes and their
dime store plastic flowers? What do we do
with the single-syllable words that are too small
to move into? Remember last week when
the mouse fell asleep in the backyard clover,
and the poet-composer warped the same thought
into seven kinds of flight? We climbed the ladder
of an ancient syntax and discovered
that the cathedral we were birthing had no
windows. Who will open the cages we've built
around ourselves? How will we capture
the slippery accents of home on someone
else's tongue? If *language is the house of being*,
then being is the house of a little talking dove,
and the little talking dove is the house of a secret,
and the secret is the house of silence, and silence
is the house of dime store plastic flowers
and the two-story mouths that carry them.

© Melissa Studdard 2020

From *No Tell Motel*

CONSTELLATIONS OF GIRLS IN RED

Eight o'clock and we open

our skirts, our rumpled lace.
Black gloved in the wings,

passing cigarettes and flirting
with the pianist. Night
folds me like a doll into a dress,

lusting for copper, chocolate,
whatever I can bite down
on. I am especially attuned

to wrists, the rehearsal
within the rehearsal.
Floorboard creaks and fire hazards.

The soloist offers me
a jug of wine, a catbird.
Can do a trick with flying

that puts the aerialist to
shame. *Mechanics*, she says,
all pulleys and wires.

Her music box plays something
that sounds like Wagner.
My hair tangles in her paper fan.

There's a crumpled dollar
in my pocket, three gallons
of salt water in the larder.

© Kristy Bowen 2007

From *Poetry*

NO WHERE, NO ONE

When I found my voice, it was so quiet
no one listened. No one. That was my best love.

And when I came up from the river muck
I found my face; that was like smiling.

The snake does not care, nor the white egret—
and whole flocks of geese, white and Canadian,

settle on the boat landing. *Rubbish.*
Rubbish and weeds. It was not so quiet

when I screamed; with my face in the water,
not a whisper. Drowned or owned,

I'm now here. My face breaks with a bit of blue—
a bit of bruise and some rawness in the rushes.

© Mary Walker Graham 2005

P.F.S. : Three Definitions

First things first: the unavoidable, primordial question must arise: what is Neo-Romanticism? What Romanticism tends to emphasize the personal, and the idea of the autonomous artist who does things, creates, for him or herself. Or, say creation ensues to fulfill a personal wish, or power drive. It is implicit in the personal nature of Romanticism that the personal is buttressed by a sense of passion or conviction, which is also personal: the individual finds themselves seized by a passionate conviction as to the validity of personal expression. This is usually pursuant to the revelation of a personal, individualized gift, a unique talent. To make a long, cumbersome story short: the Romantic artist is supposed to, as the saying goes, *mean it*. The backbone of personal conviction and personal sincerity equips the Romantic artist to “mean it” with as much passionate intensity as can seize an individual human being. So, again to compress a long, cumbersome story, “Neo” along with “Romanticism” simply means a new group of artists who express themselves out of passionate, individualized sincerity, and with personal, individually gifted equipment. This, against the backdrop of a post-modern aesthetic landscape that demeans the individual, and, to be quizzical, “doesn’t mean it.” Post-modernity frowns on the gifted individual, and on individual conviction. Neo-Ro takes for granted that post-modern irony, impersonality, effete half-assed-ness, and auto-destruction of the history of art has grown stale, over-circumscribed, and parochial.

Perhaps a bunch of gifted individuals could put some sparkle back on America's cultural surface. That's the presupposition.

The Creatrix, as a definable character in art, has now developed out of Neo-Romanticism. The Creatrix is a female artist who embodies the self-determination, autonomy, and complex sense of individuality which tends to manifest in Neo-Ro, and Neo-Ro creations. I am taking for granted that the Creatrix, as a definable art-character, does begin with Abby Heller-Burnham, Mary Evelyn Harju, and Jenny Kanzler. What distinguishes the Creatrix from post-modern female, and feminist, archetypes, is a sense of Eros, or the erotic, developed itself to an extreme pitch of intensity. This, even in Kanzler, where this development is stunted or warped into mutant form. The sense of the erotic is grasped, felt, and registered with emotions consonant with an integration not found in post-modernity: straightforward passion, straightforward longing, straightforward physical need, conveyed in a fashion which does not need to abuse the viewer with the dull, dispossessed ironies which have now become a post-modern tradition. Why Eros in American art can be made new now, especially with Heller-Burnham's immersion in queer life, is that Eros in American art has never had formal parameters imposed on it, by painters who are not merely servants, but masters, of formality, on a level with classicist Europe. This is not to say that the Creatrix has to be a painter. But, if we are to start with Heller-Burnham, Harju, and Kanzler as initial archetypes, these are some reference points which might be of service to us, in an effort not to be strained by an atmosphere in which narratives of form, and narratives of passion, are disavowed.

At the beginning of the Aughts in Philadelphia, I attempted to found an artist's co-op, to stage multi-media art events around Philadelphia. I called the first co-op This Charming Lab. It met with limited success. By the middle of the Aughts, the situation had ripened. I now had the man power and venues to stage the events I wanted to stage, which would involve multi-media, around ideas and interpretations of Artaud, the Theater of Cruelty, and what could be made of Artaudian spectacle with the resources at hand. My essential partnership in the initial-model Philly Free School was with three fellow artists: Mike Land, Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum, and Nick Gruberg. Matthew Stevenson and Hannah Miller also proved to be invaluable. Abby Heller-Burnham, Mary Evelyn Harju, and Jenny Kanzler all contributed as tangent artists. As of the early Teens, I began to use Philly Free School as a moniker employed to cover my entire cultural life in Aughts Philadelphia. This created a context for Abby, Mary, and Jenny to be representatively Free School artists, as well. Not to mention, those who had participated in Free School events in Chicago and New York, and everyone who had been published in Philly Free School Post (P.F.S. Post). Why Philly Free School acts as a correlative to Neo-Romanticism and the Creatrix is that it is, to be obvious, based in Philadelphia. On a less obvious note, "Free" and "School" together

are meant to imply a group of artists on a vision quest, past the confines of post-modernity, multi-culturalism, and academic feminism, to learn what keys will turn what locks where so as to establish a maximum sense of residency in the most spacious, loft-like socio-aesthetic, socio-sexual, and generally socio-cultural rooms; to know, if it will be known, the boundless. Then, to begin to define the formal parameters of boundlessness in art, if they can or will be defined. And not bypass the imperative to understand what might be boundless in human life and thought, too.

From Milk Magazine

INSTRUCTIONS FOR WHEN TRAVELING ABROAD

A petticoat beneath a black skirt may mend the interstices between syllables.

For every vaulted ceiling, or tattered calendar, draw an X across your forearm.

Do not long to steal the chandelier, or place oranges at the foot of St. Cecelia.

On Saturdays, wash your lingerie in white, scentless soap.

© Kristy Bowen 2005

From diode poetry

WE'RE ALWAYS GETTING THE STORY WRONG

The film tells of a gigantic, island-dwelling ape called Kong who dies in an attempt to possess a woman.

They're out there flying, those tiny machines,
the wind-up birds that want to carry my love
from the cradle of my hand. I hear them rushing

in the shiny distance, see them buzzing
black rings around my head, trying to calm
the shrieks of their metal wings by diving down at me.

I think how my thumb swipes across her body
and something thumps inside her chest, how
if those machines would let me, I'd pour oil

along the noise of their necks and clear
the caked ore from the engine of their jaws. Instead,
I hear the sound of their biplane wings shearing off.

How I marvel at their speed as they ping past, my hands wanting
but so useless to hold them.

© A. Bowen 2013

More from *Dusie*

THE KNIFE GAME

In a dream, I'm waiting for someone to pick me up— a red Ford with a broken steering wheel. I've killed the bride. I didn't mean to. She was smaller than me. Had several tiny blue sleeping pills and a lisp. *Silver*, she'd say, *silver*. Something dark swimming toward me in the house, like the game, every third girl moving to the next chair. I'm haunted by machines, strange metallic aches in my wrists. A woman in the liquor store asks: *are you okay, is something wrong?* I have several bottles of tequila beneath my dress. A tiny stage beneath my sternum, a peep show girl. *She looks kind of like your wife*. Before the hatpins and black gloves. I get used to you in my mouth.

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P.F.S. : Visionary Deadness

As much as I was, and am, a participant in the Philadelphia Renaissance, there is something to me very inscrutable about it— probably because, as an organic conglomeration of socio-aesthetic energies (rather than a calculated, bought out bid to occupy cultural and commercial space), its movements (backwards, forwards, and sideways) are unpredictable, even loopy. Thus it was that by 2009, my attitude towards Philadelphia and Neo-Romanticism had undergone many modifications. Because I was moving up in the ranks as a heavily published and publishing avant-

garde poet (my first print full-length text had come out through Otoliths in 2007), and was doing so with no particular support from the university whose fellowship was largely funding me (Temple), I was in a very ambiguous social position. The cohesive, Highwire mid-Aughts form of PFS had collapsed; Mary and I united again for '07 and then separated by '08; I had largely lost touch with Abs; my confrontations with Jenny Kanzler were inconclusive. The Philly avant-profs seemed undecided as to whether I should be recognized by them or not; by this time, I was not only publishing alongside them, but when a lengthy review of my second print book appeared in *Jacket Magazine* 37 that summer, it seemed to me that I had brokered a high enough position for myself that I would be fine, thank you, with or without their sanctimonious blessings. The popular series I had going on my blog *Stoning the Devil* at the time, regarding "post-avant" as a possible movement in poetry, confirmed this — I figured prominently in dozens of high-level theoretical online arguments, and my name was being used in conjunction with many older, established poets.

Then, by August, my final hook-up happened with Abs. Worth noting that as of summer 2009, Abs was still lithe and gorgeous. Not to mention, a brief YouTube celebrity. In 2010, Abs looks deteriorated rapidly, though she remained lithe. Her lifestyle got the better of her. All this coincided with the beginning of my second fellowship year. I did not have to teach, and had already passed the dread comp exams, which did its sometimes wonted task of upping my IQ and (more importantly) steeling my nerves. As I prepared to move my writing into interstellar overdrive, it was difficult not to notice that the rich personal life I had enjoyed all through the Aughts had dissipated into a fragmentary state. Mary, against everyone's advice and wishes, had left Philadelphia to do an MFA in Manhattan; she had already earned a PAFA certificate; but we corresponded, and she left comments on my blog with some frequency. The absence of Mary, Abs, and the other P.F.S. characters left a vacuum in my life, now filled by a rigorous dedication to forging ahead on all fronts as a writer and theorist. What I wanted to do was to expand the Apparition Poems section of my Blazevox e-book *Beams* into a full-length manuscript; and to do this by broadening the parameters of what could be called an Apparition Poem. I already had some material written which fit this bill. I noticed the new poems getting richer, more assured, both formally and thematically, towards an attempt at the timelessness I loved in Keats' Odes and sonnets.

All through September and October, an eerie feeling hung in the air around me, and around Center City in general— a sense of something misplaced, and of energies moving, as Abby was, in strange subterranean directions. For two weeks in November, Philly enjoyed unusually warm weather— I could not write, and suffered a minor nervous breakdown, distinguished by strange, shamanistic visions of grisly murders and violence in general, alternating with a sense that Center City was

suffering a major internal meltdown. The Aughts party was over. If blood had been spilled around me, I had not seen it— but, by late '09, I felt it, and her (Abby), intuitively. The recession had become a formidable claw.

I also made an interesting decision in the middle of my shamanistic voyage— rather than assume that my visions qualified me as crazy, I would take what was visionary about my experience and embrace it. This played itself out in tactile terms— at one point on the voyage, I called, in a state of panic, to be taken into custody, so to speak. I went out of my apartment, and when I came back, they, the mental health goons, were waiting outside the building in an ambulance. Following a decisive instinct, I snubbed them, and resolved to take care of the rest of my voyage myself, rather than be tamed by others for my immersion in the visionary. As it turns out, all I needed to do was sleep for a few days. When I had regained my strength, I was ready to write on a level I never had before. The shamanistic voyage, macabre, and solitary, as it was, had been worth it.

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First things first: the unavoidable, primordial question must arise: what is Neo-Romanticism? What Romanticism tends to emphasize the personal, and the idea of the autonomous artist who does things, creates, for him or herself. Or, say creation ensues to fulfill a personal wish, or power drive. It is implicit in the personal nature of Romanticism that the personal is buttressed by a sense of passion or conviction, which is also personal: the individual finds themselves seized by a passionate conviction as to the validity of personal expression. This is usually pursuant to the revelation of a personal, individualized gift, a unique talent. To make a long, cumbersome story short: the Romantic artist is supposed to, as the saying goes, *mean it*. The backbone of personal conviction and personal sincerity equips the Romantic artist to “mean it” with as much passionate intensity as can seize an individual human being. So, again to compress a long, cumbersome story, “Neo” along with “Romanticism” simply means a new group of artists who express themselves out of passionate, individualized sincerity, and with personal, individually gifted equipment. This, against the backdrop of a post-modern aesthetic landscape that demeans the individual, and, to be quizzical, “doesn’t mean it.” Post-modernity frowns on the gifted individual, and on individual conviction. Neo-Ro takes for granted that post-modern irony, impersonality, effete half-assed-ness, and auto-destruction of the history of art has grown stale, over-circumscribed, and parochial. Perhaps a bunch of gifted individuals could put some sparkle back on America’s cultural surface. That’s the presupposition.

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More from moria poetry

SUNKEN / LOST

for white almighty
the drop

around you opium
sunken lost

around bright
last push

your the mine
in dreams belt

probing what eyes
pleasant in nails

the eyes the ground
don't vein arm your

popped yellow out-back
on embarrassment

needle once took
break moving

year hero
said too slowly

closing i read you far
your you and

releasing the me
head squeezes fast catch

might vein fingers
want gone

the poking cigarette
strike old fascination

© Andrew Lundwall 2004

From *moria* poetry

THE NEWLYWEDS CLIMB A FENCE

After the light and the chandelier scraping,
the double-star making, it's hard to face
the red carpet, the casuistry show,

the vacuuming and dusting, the unquiet eye.
Do I wish I could give you "a bath of gold apples"
or "all the songs that sleep in history?" Maybe

this slant alternative is better-plucking lashes
from a winter magazine, little Domestic
winks, if we want, like Italian frames.

Night boats might ferry us further, my friend.
Between our ribs, negatives of future architectures,
textures mind-nestled in flesh splinter-tender.

Let the bog-dwellers dream of American cars,
however grateful for "the Woman and the Dog."
We praise them all and drink our grape juices.

© Kristy Odelius 2007

20th Anniversary

October 10th marks the precise twentieth anniversary of P.F.S. Post taking to the airwaves. Over twenty precise years, I'd like to offer thanks to everyone who has participated in the site and helped to make it a memorable one. To mark the twentieth anniversary, *The Metallic Autumn*, by Andrew Duncan, which first appeared on P.F.S. Post a month into its existence, seems appropriate. Thanks again.

Rain silvers the slate roofs, smoke blows through the rain.
The hawthorn hedges are a red haze.
The hills above the town are blurred by mist.
Beauty is stripped away.
Light is pierced with nostalgia, slow and lax.
Decadent season.
Water forms as a haze between light and rain.
Flowers and leaves decaying in the streams
mix earth and water in slow dispersal.
Blur steals over visible forms,
smoke and moulder stir in the ash of light.
The pools are sorrowful, the sips of flowers split.
I find a single apple whole after all these weeks,
skin whole and pulp firm as sapwood.

In a slush of softness and excrescence,
late berries languish on the tendrils,
lush to dissolution, spoilt with juice,
blackier than nature with a white tinge like regret.
In the shadow of the sunny fronds,
where dew never dries, they drink and rot.
Rain on the leaf, dew on the bine. Mites
finger the abacus of their flesh.
Rain silvers the roof-slates, smoke blows through the rain.

Season of memory and regret.
Barrels coop up the giddy hearts for recollection.
The animals grow lazier and furrier:
search out shelter and apathy!
The heady noon is gone, the soft inner of the blossoms
and their offer. The rarer veins are frozen in their course.
We waited for the glance of the sun.
The osier of bare birch twigs seems like smoke
against the red glow of the Apple going down.

Rain silvers the roof-slates, smoke blows through the rain.
A swirl of leaves like heavy fire
pours through the tamping of a world on the wane.
The darkened sky withholds the weary forms.

Crepuscle, dissolution of concepts;
season of case-hardening ash,
season of ferment and thorough steeping.
Fruits infringe their brinks and stream their brims
overlapping the thick pulp of fallen things.

The principle of ice shall come to judgment
on the lusts of Nature, searching out the flaw.
Bare branches detach pure metre from an obese rhetoric.
Blue glare shall stake out the torpid mist,
pure-axile crystals shall affirm the morass.

© Andrew Duncan 2001



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Blog Information Profile for afieled



P.F.S. POST

PHILADELPHIA FRABJOUS

P.F.S.: *Trish* (preface)

Editor:

- Adam Fieled

For those of us born in the 70s and 80s, who lived through the Aughts in Center City and West Philadelphia, our perception of Philadelphia will always be colored by the sexualized over and undercurrents which animated, charged, and lit the Philly arts scene on fire with sexual energy during that time. Many of us were annoyed by the misconception the media created of a not-fully-sexed Philadelphia; but we were disarmed on that level. I have said elsewhere, and it bears repeating, that if the city of Philadelphia has a sun sign it is Gemini. It is another way of saying this: Philadelphia from within looks and feels vastly different than Philadelphia seen in a cursory way or from a distance. The sultriness around our scene was warmer and more human than the scenes we had all read about in New York and L.A.: we weren't motivated by money or fame as such, or the desire to create and maintain images of/for ourselves. The hot blood that ran through McGlinchey's, Dirty Frank's, the Good Dog, and all our other hang out venues, had some actual romance in it; we all went so far as to care about other people. We were a get-close crew. The Gemini twist, as ever for Philadelphia, is that if the seeds we plant ripen correctly, Philadelphia may go on record as one of the hottest scenes in the history of the arts, thus overturning a century of bad press, neglect, abuse, and widely spread misinformation, and a corrupt arts-dissemination system with it.

- From Sharkforum
- From Caffeine Destiny
- Elucidating Derrida and Differance: Lecture given ...
- From Tears in the Fence 60
- From Otoliths
- For November
- Adam Fieled (editor, Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvani...
- From American Writing: A Magazine
- From Tears in the Fence
- P.F.S. : Sex and Shadows

Contributors

- Adam Fieled



Archives

Art and life have a way of co-mingling which can be difficult to finesse for an author. Because I dared to place her image on the cover of this book/pdf, I might as well announce what will be obvious to those who knew me and the Philly scene during the Aughts: the female protagonist of *Trish* is modeled on Philadelphia painter Mary Harju. The life I built with Mary (and with the Philly Free School) was highly unusual; we were artists without being rich kid dilettantes; lovers without being mutually exclusive; Penn students and graduates who went out of our way not to be academic; and human beings who tossed and turned on our own emotional waves without trying to fake balance or calm. It was a scattered life we had, and a haphazard one; but the love and affection we shared was genuine. In fact, if I have

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ever had a Laura or a Beatrice, it is Mary. The difference, of course, between myself and Plutarch and Dante, is that Mary and I consummated our relationship very fast. The heat we had for each other never quite let up, either. As per Mary's house (4325 Baltimore Avenue), as is seen here, in the early Aughts— it was an experience in itself, filled as it was, always, with artists, musicians, and other bohemians. On certain nights, everyone in the house would be intoxicated on something or other. Many nights I spent there, I felt as if the entire house had ascended into deep space, into some other, enchanted, sensuous realm. I have memories of floating down hallways and stairs. Mary was a wonderful playmate and an excellent mate in general. She was never boring. And, to the extent that I hope this piece conveys the intense electric excitement I felt in her presence, it is a reminder that these elevated feelings are always possible, even during a Great Recession. It is the Gemini stare of Philadelphia down the barrel of a shotgun.

.....

As feminists have duly noted, the archetypal figure Psyche in Keats' Ode Cycle is not exactly empowered. She provides fodder for Keats to create a convincing imaginative vista from; her overt sexuality, her beauty and vulnerability create a space for her to unite the Heaven and Earth. She is a goddess who can descend to earthly tactility and palpability. As she unites all realms, Keats' reaction in text is intellectually, emotionally, and physically satisfying for him; but we are never shown whether that sense of satisfaction is shared by Psyche. We may choose to believe that Psyche, being a goddess, is loftily sublime over the kind of impulses which create the congeries of Keats' reaction to her; or it may be that Keats wishes us to believe that Psyche mirrors him precisely, as a tangent (also) to Echo as a mythological figure. If feminists disrespect Keats' version of Romanticism, it is because, by not granting Psyche a voice, he exudes a sense of supercilious condescension to her/ in her direction. Perhaps. But this is not an issue in *Trish: A Romance*. Trish is introduced to us, in the poem's opening sequence, as having painted a masterpiece called *The Vessel*, which we see hanging in a prominent public position. *The Vessel* is an imaginative vista opened by Trish herself; we perceive her, instantly, as both having a voice and carrying the clout to make it publicly heard. More than that: she is a creative artist of some stature; we might call her, in the adumbrating of Trish mythology, a *Creatrix*. If the *Creatrix*, or any *Creatrix* figure, is to take her place as a Romantic archetype next to Psyche, and other passive Muses, the first recognition of how this may happen is the recognition that the *Creatrix* has a unique will-to-power. She is able to unite the intellectual, emotional, and physical compartments of her consciousness, by imposing her imaginative will on the world. Trish's Philadelphia is specifically a stage on which she can act out the complex

dynamics of her will's complications, intricacies, and idiosyncrasies. Mary Evelyn Harju herself was, indeed, a formidably dramatic personality.

So, if Trish becomes a Creatrix, we may see her as an empowered version of Psyche. She is post-Odal; sexualized, a figure of myth, vulnerable, down in the dirt, but an active, passionate player in the world nonetheless. There is no room for a Creatrix in the Odal Cycle; Keats needs to keep Psyche in place, and his starry-eyed Romanticism and spontaneous overflows of powerful feeling center on a version of the feminine which poses no threats to Keats' masculinity. Keats, with Psyche, can afford to be androgynous; sex with her can be "sweet," "tender," and "quiet"; because she, as an archetype, cannot speak back to him. Trish is a back-talker, who assumes parity (or superiority) to the males of the species, always. Trish, being self-made, will not brook interference, either with her art or what happens in her boudoir; and the protagonist of *Trish* accepts this, even as it lands him in deep water when he falls head over heels in love with her. The Creatrix is thus involved in complex intimacies.

The complexity of Trish's character, and the intimacies attendant on it, is involved with trying to balance a creative and personal life; how to be impersonal and personal simultaneously. Such is the way of the Creatrix; an archetypal figure who achieves states of balances by imposing her creative will on the cosmos. That feature of Aughts Philadelphia: a shared supposition among creative participants that women have as loud a voice as men, and thechutzpah to make these voices heard on high public levels: is one that Trish goes out of its way to reinforce as more than mere myth. So it was. That's why, at the end of the day, feminists should have reason to be satisfied both with *Trish* and with Aughts Philadelphia. The arrival in the world of several formidable *Creatrixes* coincided with so little resistance to their status as powerful presences that sexism in Aughts Philly was a no-go. Our Romanticism, which was also a kind of transcendentalism against mundane reality, was a collective embrace of complexity, as well as a sustained attempt to create a shared imaginative vista, all through the Philadelphia and West Philadelphia houses, bars, galleries, coffee shops, and the rest. What we created has many things in common with the imaginative vista opened by Keats' Odes— a sense of cognitive enchantment, and a recognition of the mind's capacity both to discern enchantment and then to re-create, in imaginative ways, what we have discerned— even as what a *Creatrix* is takes the Odal Vision, Odal Cycle, and Odal Stage, and utterly transforms it into a realm in which women, as well as men, can express how their own personal version of enchantment descended upon them.

.....

Ironie, in a piece about luxury, sensuality, and ease, that it's taken me so long, until

2024, to finish *Trish: A Romance*. The portion of the Aughts Philly dream which has remained crystalline over twenty to twenty five years— emancipation from limiting belief systems or creeds, freedom to live expressively, and, most importantly, manifestations of extreme, libertine-worthy excess— are not difficult to define or express. The difficulty in the *Trish: A Romance* textual journey, which began in 2009, is to render luxury, sensuality, and ease, while remaining faithful to complexities built into myself, Trish (Mary) and Tobi (Abby) as characters. Not all libertine models are complicated people; we were. Also worth noting about 2009; the last real chunk of time I spent with Abby Heller-Burnham, in the 23rd and Arch apartment (Westminster Arch), involved *Trish: A Romance*. I wanted to tape Abby talking about Mary, narrating their friendship, to see if I could use it. Thus, one section of the book (I thought) could be Abby-on-Mary. Didn't work. When the tape began to roll, Abby wanted to talk about herself and her travails, which were gruesome in late-summer '09. Abby was not a happy camper then, and all the ease, the bliss of the six, seven, eight years before were gone. I was never to interact with her significantly again.

Yet, *Trish: A Romance* remains, a testament to a period of time with many miracles built into it. Like the travelogue writings of Christopher Isherwood, the text dwells on a surfeit of characters who don't just dream but live wild adventures and romances. The bizarre formality of the piece— seven sets of six sonnet-length stanzas— was invented so that the action could be conveyed in a vessel (as Mary would say) lean and mean enough to make the ride a brisk one. The miracle isn't just in fornication and carousing— it's the fact that said fornication and carousing was done in a spirit not just of affection but of love. At the end of the day, these are characters who love each other. This, notwithstanding the concluding revelation of the protagonist— that Trish has remained at least partially unknowable to him. The point is, the characters in *Trish: A Romance* are not scallywags. They have, and notice, their own emotions. Even as accusations of self-indulgence are not necessarily misplaced. People will take *Trish: A Romance* not just to Christopher Isherwood but to Brett Easton-Ellis; that much sex, drugs, youthfulness, and rambunctious indulgence does form a sense of symmetry with *Less Than Zero*. I would only choose to say that in *Trish*, a sense of emotional/spiritual engagement, rather than dispossession, takes all the Philly-L.A. energy and harnesses it into a form more human, more likeable than the Easton-Ellis book. Remember: the three protagonists are all artists, creative types. *La Boheme*? No. Something unique, that's just what it is. See for yourself.

For autumn '25

EPHEMERA

“Your eyes, that once were never weary of mine,
are bowed in sorrow under pendulous lids,
because our love is waning.”

And then she:

“Although our love is waning, let us stand
by the lone border of the lake once more,
together in that hour of gentleness
when the poor, tired child, Passion, falls asleep:
how far away the stars seem, and how far
is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart!”

Pensive they paced along the faded leaves,
while, slowly, he whose hand held hers replied:
“Passion has often worn our wandering hearts.”

The woods were round them, and the yellow leaves
fell like faint meteors in the gloom, and once
a rabbit, old and lame, limped down the path;
Autumn was over him: and now they stood
on the lone border of the lake once more:
turning, he saw that she had thrust dead leaves,
gathered in silence, dewy as her eyes,
in bosom and hair.

“Ah, do not mourn,” he said,
“that we are tired, for other loves await us;
hate on and love through unrepining hours.
Before us lies eternity; our souls
are love, and a continual farewell.”

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P.F.S.: Baudrillard's Conspiracy (2006)

Got around to reading Baudrillard's *Conspiracy of Art*. Baudrillard's main thrust is that after Duchamp, the banal got tangled up into art, creating what he calls a

"transaesthetic" society; a society where everything could possibly be art. Warhol then took this to the extreme by turning "art" into a mechanized routine, taking out everything transcendent in art and replacing it with plain quotidian artifacts, or the simulacra of these. Baudrillard claims, staying on the surface of things, and accepting surface-level narratives of art history without inquiry or objection, that this influx of banality has destroyed art as we know it, and that art has reached an advanced stage of "nullity," with the art community frantically trying to pretend that this hasn't happened. It will be seen, over a durational expanse, whether Heller-Burnham will prove to be the antidote to this melange of circumstances, contexts, established aesthetic mores and neglected ones, or not. The melange, of course, being traditional, parochial America.

Significantly, Baudrillard never mentions poetry. so it's clear his critique is aimed at visual art and visual artists. Nevertheless, I took his rather vulgarized critique somewhat personally. In Language/post-avant circles, there is a somewhat prevailing ethos that "anything can be poetry/make a poem." Certain experimental poets have used this as an excuse to substitute banality for transcendence, nullity for depth, simulation for authenticity. Authenticity, of course, is a dicey issue here; objections to the lyric "I" and long-standing quandaries inhering in it, and in poet-extolled authenticity, are commonplace in avant-garde circles. I mean authenticity on a level which is meant to imply seriousness, a commitment to aesthetically and not merely conceptually or politically valid or relevant poetics; an approach not wholly ironic. And irony not used, as it often is by Conceptualists, as an excuse to abase, belittle, and sanitize an art-form into advanced rigor mortis obsolescence.

Pursuant to this reading of Baudrillard, and as I've discussed elsewhere, I've come to the conclusion that the bravest thing a poet can do now, paradoxical as it seems, is to "warp" backwards, towards form and narrative. Warping back per se is the *bete noir* of post-avantists in general; but, as Baudrillard noted, going forward into even more vapid banality is not much of an option either. A brave retreat towards formalism and narrativity is a valid move because, as you cannot step in the same river twice, a narrative-thematic movement backwards/forwards would have to create new forms to reflect new circumstances and contexts. We wouldn't be going back in a merely imitative or Centrist sense; we'd be warped forwards/backwards by our emphasis, our preoccupation with content, specifically as regards crafting poetics out of an engagement with the most serious issues poetry and philosophy can address, the primordial ones. Philosophy in poetry, dialectic or not, nullifies whatever the transaesthetic impulse might be. It also nullifies irony, when irony is employed, as it often is by the Conceptualists, to emasculate the aesthetic.

From *Dusie*

ROPE DANCE

Morning is a burned thing, Louise.
Spoiled like a shuttered house.

Paper everywhere— under the beds,
in the dresser, floating
the pale skin of soup.

You make a cage of your fingers
to keep out light. Chicken bones
to keep out the dead. Grey
where it's all wearing at the ends.

Your braids still tied in a V
when the dark comes to you like a cat.
A long hallway. A girl in pink
sateen against a backdrop of stars.

Make one turn, then another.
When you shut all the latches,
shut your eyes. A little gin, Louise.

© Kristy Bowen 2006



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P.F.S. POST

PHILADELPHIA FRABJOUS

*From **Pirene's Fountain***

EMILY BRONTE

these windy slopes are shorn
of the things which make life comfortable:
broad trees, broken bread, the swell

and supple curve of a lover's back.
I sit here by my window, catch
the rough, sweet scent of heather in my nostrils

and write of death and love entwined
like adders together. The poetry
lies wild in my veins, the poetry

of granite skies stabbed by rocky outcrops,
the giving spring of turf, the taste
of solitude like aloes on my tongue,

the bare, unchanging moors, which take
my sisters and myself with mute indifference
and conquer under soil all our passion.

© Alison Croggon 1991

*From **Sawbuck Poetry***

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- Adam Fieled

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MARCH

Moth-bodies of greenhouses at mid-
morning stretch out—
a syllable— cross the previous
trickster swamp. That little mister
where nozzles ought to burn,
crying *injun* at every undisclosed
box with wheels,
box with no way of returning.
Just hit me with it— Felicia says—
if I can get me and my boyfriend a pack—
intruding on this poem. Which one,
Felicia: did she mean
it, kindly? Can the passive be
as aggressive as you feel?
In my army and about my predicament
there are meteoroids covered
in the grass, there are prairie
skirts hovering, hairless as present.
I will be with you presently.
This unmade river not
done in this instant
is, shows.

© Jen Tynes 2007

From Milk Magazine

the syn-aesthete's love poem

And yesterday, blue tasted like licorice.
Even the wind chimes caused dizziness;
the ache of paper lanterns rotting
from the acacias. Perhaps the L in my name
makes you sad, evokes a film where a woman waves
from a train. Or how this horizon wants to be a hymn.
If you listen, you can hear the holes in the alphabet,
the sounds lit by the lamps of our bones.

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Perhaps with this page I could fashion a boat
or a very convincing window—
a dress made entirely of vowels.

© Kristy Bowen 2005

Adam Fieled (editor, West Philadelphia, USA): "On Love"

What tide is the realest, which pulls in a kiss?
The rigor of reaching the thing-in-itself,
from subject to object, chaos to bliss,
our frail intuition of heavenly health?
Our love is not molecules, dumbly colliding,
nor is it knowledge, formal and static,
nor is it accident, reasoned and plumbed—
it's real, meta-rational, soaring and gliding,
felt like an earthquake, bringing up panic,
taking our parts and achieving a sum.

The greater part of love is sacrifice—
flesh intermingled, tensing (push!) tingled,
this is the secret I learn from your eyes.
Giving my body, knotted, single,
tiny eruptions that come from my tongue;
plunging down surfaces, slicking the flesh,
thoughtless as leopards or hurricane winds—
watching you shudder, watching you come,
rapt in the throes of an innocent death,
giving my life to an inch of your skin.

Thus, we trade in secure oblivion
for reckless reality, messy and fleeting.
Such is the cosmos— creation, carrion,
motions of molecules merging and meeting.
Nothing is lost but notions of self-ness,
hard ideations that close and clatter,
rages of ego that strain at their walls—
nothing is gained but a sense of the deathless,
"there-ness" of spirit, "there-ness" of matter,

ultimate "there-ness" that scares as it calls.

© Adam Fieled 2003-2025

originally published in Hinge Online

From *diode*

thicket

I am all butter cream and lace when
we abandon this house for another
with a picket fence and a tiny door.
Clandestine, destined
to have too many holes we can't fill.
Despite the flurry of hands, we are drowsy,
playing cards and fucking in the afternoon.
Holding our nostalgia like a cake knife.

Soon, we abandon this car for another
with a blue lush interior that smells like Winstons.
I make a flip book out of our indiscretions'
misspellings. Finger the upholstery
while we play roulette with beer bottles.
Kiss me, kiss me not.
My hope all parade floats and dancing bears
until I split the infinitives,
spill the milk, slit the window screens.
Go for the jugular.

My sleep is still white, all paper and milk.
Counting the cracks in the ceiling,
dividing three and three and three.
Outside the amaryllis is ridiculous,
lewdly red and unruly.
I am counting spiders in the eaves as you leave.
One and one and one.

© Kristy Bowen 2010

From *Ekleksographia*

SOMETHING MAYBE

The curve of my spine *bent*,
along subway lines. The only thing
that makes sense is to lie down
on the sidewalk right now,
beer can crushed & tossed across
the street. We're not going to make it.
For an entire summer my life's
solution was to not leave
my bed. A thousand miles later
& I still want something else,
shifty and shifting away from the center.
It's clear now: we were never
going to make it. The darkness creeps
over, smears in the rain. The end
of the night means leaving the bar,
myself keeping myself in check.
Sometimes I want to go back
& do things differently,
but this is one fuck-up I can't take
back. *Pink Moon. Pink Moon. Pink Moon. Pink Moon.*
Hit play again. Lying in bed, feeling
the darkness creep over.
Let the weird back in. Find a point
in the distance, fast and furious,
something worth racing off to.
I'm looking for something new,
something catchy, something
to fall asleep to.

© Gina Myers 2009

Tammy Armstrong (Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada): "Calamari and Ink"

We needed a memory
for a meal no one could finish.
Hooked index fingers into bowls of black—
cursive graffiti
along the dining room table.

Not contained on sponge pads,
cover charge bar stamps
the ink pooled cabaret make-up.
Not all offerings from the ocean are grand.

Squid like a boxed ear
swollen, cut
re-shaped into a gift,
an adjustable ring from a small town carnival
from a lover who doesn't know me well.
I'd marry if asked.

But these rings bloat the rice indigo
marring late night calligraphy
when we can't see how
we've outstayed another welcome.

© Tammy Armstrong 2006



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P.F.S. POST

PHILADELPHIA FRABJOUS

Adam Fieled (Henniker, New Hampshire): from *Beams*: "eye eye eye"

for Maggie Mangual

nile-wide, eye eye eye.
 a sylph, bee low my buzz.
 it wants, to do, at mouth.
 no. not every one. can end,
 dare-a-licked, like is. or:
 put it, porn again. dew wit
 like its done, on, cyber.
 space, opened, bee twain. no,
 went in sight. tight tight.

© Adam Fieled 2006

Beams rides again on Blazevox

More from *No Tell Motel*

SOUND WAVES, LASER BEAMS, IMPULSES, AND SIGNALS

I feel like a mother when I wear
 someone else's shoes, tie someone else's
 laces into rabbits' feet in darkness
 on the front stairs at dawn, wait
 for the mailman to come & rub
 my heels together til we're home. I feel
 like a mother talking loudly around

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young boys & their fragrant tufts
of armpit hair on the subway, & I rev my
engine on the highway, & when I'm not behind
the wheel making horn noises with my
nose & mouth, I feel like a mother
who has forgotten how to breathe water,
insisting that everyone ought to be breathing
air by now. I feel like my mother
is dead although it hasn't happened
yet that I feel like a motherless child. I
feel like a mother when I make a list of names
that calls all my enemies out & I post the list
on a grocery store bulletin board (T's
all crossed as ugly moustaches), I feel like a mother
when I shave my beard and all my children tiptoe
around the kitchen sink giggling
& swinging from their blades,
when I am offered glasses of wine
without pieces of bread
soaking in them, when I transmit my own
signals from antennas, from a jar
in the earth to a cage full of animals
in the living room. I feel like
cooking those books for you, but that
isn't love, that's history.

© Jen Tynes 2008

from No Tell Motel

HORN OF PLENTY

The boy is a girl with a strap-on,
the girl is a boy with hips and a hole.
Are you ready to play your role?

Love came and now is gone
like an intimate disease.
Get your hands up. Freeze!

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Love came and went.
The bee, the lips of tulips, how fragrant.
He was a motherfucker. Or a mother,

and nothing's as nowhere as another,
Mother's climax fantasy *in flagrante*.
So let's have a party in my panties;

we'll grab the horn of plenty
and climb the greasy pole.
Are you ready to play your role?

© Molly Arden 2008

from *Borrowed House*

FLIRTATIONS

Drunk beside the pond, we play
with ultimatums...

:if you cannot fathom this thick mud.

:if you cannot pull the legs from this daddy-long.

*:if you cannot stew this prepubescent carrot
in your own blood.*

:if you cannot hitch the butterfly with your sugared thumb.

*:if you cannot look me in the eye
when you recite*

the filthiest passage in the grassiest language.

© Brooklyn Copeland 2008

Tammy Armstrong (Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada): "Reparations"

We dressed too early for the funeral:
at the card table, third pot of coffee
killing time
with button talk,
how stitches never match eyelets
and you as small boy
taught in French how to repair a torn knee . . .

thick fingered, you thread a needle
tighten each button on the suit jacket
tailored in Thailand
asking if the weave
is worn too shiny
from months in your backpack.

Hours from now I'll gather the suit
from the kitchen tiles—
stripped as though in flames.
I'll smooth the shoulder pads
to the wooden hanger,
align the buttons
while you stand, near naked,
in the living room,
Standard Muffler sign
our only light.

© Tammy Armstrong 2006



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P.F.S. POST

PHILADELPHIA FRABJOUS

From *X-Peri*

bottoms

a line has two sides
as hand, as work, as beam
without which I have
no line to follow,
so i
stay
hoping for direction from words
thrown up as down,
as cursive on water where
i hope to stand
but do not.

in sinking i could ask
for help, but i am
curious about the
dark shapes moving
below me.

© William Allegrezza 2016

More from *Equations* (Thesis: Julie Hayes)

Time and sex: sex chronology is not linear. Sex and time are both conversant with strange leaps. It is the first day of the first class I will ever teach. Julie looks at me with big round black eyes, soulfully. She has long wavy black hair and her looks are

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dark, foreboding. We often want what wants us; Julie makes a habit of following me, from the classroom to the subway, from the subway to the Last Drop. As a student, she's haphazard. What she teaches me is that when someone follows you, they can make you follow them; on the walk home from the Drop, I realize my mind is following her, into her apartment, onto her bed, underneath the sheets, underneath her folds, into her little stomach. But I can't. So I let her follow me, knowing that this will lead (eventually) to a culminating moment. My hunger is for continuance. Julie wants the thrill of picking up a hot potato and dropping it back into the pot. But these early weeks are all titillation, so that every soulful look to me is the countenance of continuance, has endurance written into it. Is this my wife? Marriages have been initiated in stranger fashions. Julie is as pale as Marie, but much flintier, so I know strife will be a feature of my daily existence, after we are married. I think this as I stand before the class, discoursing on Chaucer, gazing at this little wife of Bath.

.....

The semester is over, almost. I am making a pact with Satan to get away with this. It is all fine and feisty as I bite the bullet, walk the knife edge, get in touch with my renegade parts. But I never lose sight of the hunger for permanence, which is by no means Julie's. Her hunger is just to have what cannot be had, so that she can be a special person. Two hungers collide into nakedness, and neither seems to care that they don't coalesce. We are separate via our separate hungers, and human in our desperate need to pursue them, singularly, and only marginally together. Her apartment is a mess, but with high ceilings, who cares? So we climb into our bed of separate hungers and square off. I learn nothing because I do not see what her hunger is. I think she's just like me. Of course, she wants what I want. Of course, she thinks, he wants what I want, to do something to make himself a special person. What neither knows is that we're both not special, we are both (and more than we realize), lusterless in our separate lusts. There is no innocence lost because raw hungers remain innocent until proven otherwise. You can pound away a hunger, but each thrust by no means puts you deeper into the other person. You move deeper into privations of private passions, unexpressed. But Julie looks so young and callow that I don't notice these things. This, I think, is the beginning; but Julie has already become a special person, and wants a way out. We sleep topless in the May heat.

.....

Something holds Julie back so that there can't be too much of this. While I am with her, she controls everything, from my sensations to my destiny. She can bite me off, permanently cripple me, or please me if she wants. As master, she decides how much hunger she will or will not assuage. She uses her hands as well as her mouth, doing

little twists like she's learned to do from Internet porn. It's delicious, my legs shake from the unbearable nature of the sensations. The problem is, she then freezes, which means she is deliberately effacing my most overwhelming pulses. So I come in her frozen, static mouth, with a sense of intense anti-climax, and I am too bashful to instruct her as to how to do this properly. Yet any woman who brings me to this must be a darling and an angel. Julie, this darling angel, stands on the threshold of womanhood, and her hunger is merely to control. There is no sense of service, and since we are in my apartment there is no sense of comfort for her. What she wants to take home with her is a sense of having bested me. As she gazes at my closed eyes and opened mouth, there is (I imagine now) a sense of bitterly held contempt for my weakness, my humanity. We never fuse our different stupidities, so that I see no depths in those rounded eyes of jet, and she knows that she has now gotten what she wants from me; there is no more specialness.

© Adam Fieled 2011

More from *The Argotist Online* (poetry archive)

WHAT WE ARE MISSING

Within a rhizomatic structure
having accepted the orchid of immanence
in its sole— *one life*— present
knots and knots abound & intensify
reflected on the carefully drawn & cut facets
of the transparent topaz,

from apocalypse to resurgence
from maelstroeming downward movements
to enlightened atemporal breaks
an outside timetable diligently recorded
on scraps of paper/ pocketbooks/ agendas,
collected in tel. #/ email addresses,
grants an order or madness,
stress or a safe ground on which to gather
the body without organs

a tired Santa Claus
with a burdensome bag on his shoulders

or a clumsy diver with oxygen bottles,
an astronaut stumbling on the barren surface of the moon
or a Michelin man stuck on the roof of a building,
we think we are thinking
we think we are overlooking towns

bodies and bodies
ants in the traffic
blindly rushing
without perception.

© Anny Ballardini 2006

From The Argotist Online

FLOUNDERING BY THE PREACHING OF THE WORD
(Radio Edit)

I. The Bird That Never Flew

Nothing as sophisticated as a copper clip,
nothing that could be reversed, poor bird:
it was plucked at birth.

Wee bald hatchling, what chance?
What chance did it ever have?
Even the fattest, most languid cat
could've trapped it under cruel claw.

What chance? Its caged-bird song
plaintive as foghorns
strained from the Clyde's forgotten dawn,
melancholy with dull dreams
of washing days and tenement greens.

Oh dearie me. Oh me, oh my!
Puir wee chookie bird couldnae fly.

II. The Bell That Never Rang

Cracked and choked with city soot
this bell is mute,
witless in senile silence:
a belly full of bitter bile.

What use a voice as clear as cymbals
if the heart's too dark to love?
What use calling up the faithless
to hear the preaching of the word?

III. The Tree That Never Grew

This is no dear green place
but a wasteland
of broken concrete blocks,
with barbed wire strands
blowing like streamers
in the wind.

And this tree is no tree
but a petrified, withered stump,
without branches, without leaves,
its bark, frost-bled,
scored with a cross-hatch
of angry slogans.

The pope
and also, inevitably,
the queen,
and so the acronyms
of these warring tribes
grow, like fungus.

No wonder
this tree never grew.
How could anything flourish
under such leaden skies?

IV. The Fish That Never Swam

Bloody river,
bloody river of this city's undoing
with your bloody history
of shipbuilding and conquest,
of slavery and theft,
all dressed up
in the tarnished gilt
of imperial majesty:

your dereliction is a plague
visited by the gods
upon all your daughters and sons.

Syphilitic river, no wonder
no fish ever swam
in your poisonous waters.

© Dee Rimbaud 2005

From Eyewear

AMARYLLIS CANADIAN TIRE

Near the return and exchange desk
the sink drain blare of *Cash 11, Manager to Cash 11*,
bulb-split amraryllises,
petals halogen rusted, garden bulimic,
stand sturdy in clay cups
while the mats at the automatic door grow streamy
with boot tracked snow, slush.

Ski coats shift sibilation,
each down-plump body
maneuvering the card table,
careful not to catch a leaf
above sparkle-glue bijouteries,
outsized flanges, piano hinges.

Amaryllis—
dismissed amid vulcanized rubber
boxing day sale perfume—
an ostentatious widow
price shops at the discount tire.

© Tammy Armstrong 2006

From *Siren's Silence* (Volume 2 Number 3)

GIRL IN A BOX

I'm a girl in a box, yup, that's me, here I sit seven hours a day, five days week in a chemical fog, peering out of the windows of my glass box, my 12-by-12 crystal cage, a caged girl with a painted porcelain face contorted in a Revlon death mask I sculpt daily from cosmetics I shoplifted from Rite-Aid, under my cleopatra sex goddess wig that glints glossy and unreal under the neon lights where I turn and burn into crystal, into a glass mummy who rots the minutes and hours away in the girlie zoo, wrapped in swaddling lacy underthings, moon drunk from the bee-stings that cover my arms, sometimes nodding but mostly awake staring at myself with mascara eyes that smolder in the mirror and day-dreaming under the glare of the red bulb that illuminates my cell, imprisoned by the 24-hour stare of the crimson sun that never sets and follows each orgasm I fake, a sun that mocks me as I pose in the window where I watch each anonymous man tread the wax floors munching on candy bars or smoking cigarettes as they gawk, all of us good girl animals of Al's Triple XXX theater who smirk and tap on the windows with fat knuckles begging *choose me! choose me!* Not me. I wait, the queen bee with my dope-sick patience, well-trained, house broken, my mirror me watching, freezing into a wicked wicked witch baby, a white-trash ice-queen, eyeing Dee-dee, the fake redhead cokehead in the booth across from me with basilick eyes as she strikes her syphilitic supermodel pose from better and younger days, beckoning with her yen sigh and spacey eyes, her rolls of fat becoming lazy, voluptuous as she wraps her boa around herself taut like a telephone wire, communicating something nobody will ever hear.

SLAM! the metal door bangs shut on the other side of my box, Italian shoes scuffling on the floor of my crypt, knocking on the window. He chose me. I hear him cursing, fiddling in frustration with the money box in the darkened chamber, shoving a deuce up the slot of the little black box on the other side of the confessional, this little black electronic box that bleeps *SESSION* and devours the dollars of the hard-working

American men, the harvest of truckers and mobsters and lawyers, swallows up all the capitalist secrets and lies of the young white punks, the middle-aged black guys with their SSI checks, the ancient Asian men who tremble when they cum, the cool-ass, cracked Latino men, and your occasional slobbering drunken yuppie couple, in one greedy, democratic gulp, because this is America, dammit, and we're all free to exploit ourselves as long as we don't step on somebody else's turf, but the shutter is sliding up and so much for politics because there he is, standing there, middle-aged caucoid knight with thinning hair, big nose and pervert glasses that hide his x-ray eyes that burn through the glass wall that separates us, his hands stuffed in a green L.L. Bean jacket that his wife probably got him last christmas, trying to smile but obviously scared shitless of me, the whore, flicking my smoke and dropping dirty glitter on the palace floor and believe it or not I'm actually feeling a little sorry for this poor schmuck, this burn-out insurance salesman type who stands there looking a little dumb and a little fat at me, his slum queen, slumming it up at Al's on this beautiful sunny afternoon.

© Jeanine Campbell 1998

P.F.S.: Symbolists and Hallucinogenics (Part 1)

Nineties heritage, as it could start from State College, works under the aegis of what was being imbibed by the kiddies— not uppers or downers (that much), but hallucinogenics. Many nights in the mid-to-late Nineties, the Nineties revolution in State College was a revolution-in-consciousness around skewered perspectives, visionary trances, and painterly firmaments. State College was and is serviced, in this respective, by something beneath the surface which illuminates the entirety of Happy Valley, and central Pennsylvania— a mystique emanating from Mother Nature herself, around a sense of earth magic resonating from the greener areas in and around State College. Nature breathes there. Hallucinogens heighten the sense of ecstasy and fulsomeness bestowed by greenery on the place.

No joke that, on the syllabus for true Nineties State College hipsters, a place was made for the French Symbolist poets of the nineteenth century— Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Verlaine. Hipsterism, in an era of turmoil, balanced imperatives other than just popular music and parties— reading culture in State College wasn't nothing. Other than the philosophy texts I was studying, up to and including Kant and over to the Deconstructionists (philosophy was my major at PSU, and my philosophy credits did transfer over to Penn), the heaviest lit in my brain were the Symbolists,

who took all of our sense of being on trips and navigating mind-scapes and articulated what we couldn't, yet.

So, the lot of us had not just a sense of a soundtrack for our adventures— we had texts which meant something to us, which were also conduits to our personal (and collective) revolutions. The poem from *Something Solid, Season in Hell: White Candle* takes, and places this set of circumstances on the table for all to see. Rimbaud, in his masterwork, enacts an interior process in text of complete personal revision and revolution of self. My poem takes what was already transformative and makes it do double-time, enumerating not only a personal revolution but a revolution pertaining to the rigors of early marriage. Marriage and Rimbaud are not naturally simpatico; but the Nineties sense of unlikely juxtapositions (including State College's game of class-confounding) take, and make the contingencies which serve the poem resonate to a Symbolistic frequency. Such is one pertinent manifestation of Nineties-ism. Other, similar early work, like *Room 510 Atherton Hilton*, *The dawn broke over our bodies*, and *Song for Maria*, takes Symbolist impulses and radically eroticizes them, working along a vibe axis of enchantment/damnation, searching for a potent voice still youthful, still casual (if passionate), in heaven/hell. If something or someone was supposed to be inhibiting our creativity, they failed.

.....

On a more practical note: State College in the 90s was very strange. It should've been that, being an artist and coming from a background steeped in the arts, I would feel uncomfortable and disoriented there. After all, the public associate State College and Penn State with football, Joe Paterno, and little else. Granted, PSU State College is a high-ranking school with several outstanding departments (including continental philosophy, which was my major), but its image or "face to the world" is all about athletics. It's just that I didn't find State College that limiting. There was an active underground scene in the arts in the 90s, which included inspired participants, and which gave the place some real vitality.

I moved to State College in '94 without formalizing any plans to do theater or anything theater related. I had spent the summer of '92 at Carnegie Mellon doing pre-college for acting, but it hadn't led anywhere. What theater at PSU had going that I was intrigued with was a weekly series of plays, written by students and graduate students and produced by them too: Outlaw Playwrights. By the spring of '95, I was actively writing plays, because the outlet to have them produced was there. By the the spring of '99 (I had left a script in late '98 once I'd moved to NYC), I'd had four one-acts produced.

State College had an active indie rock scene, too. Summer in State College in the 90s can't have been that much different than Athens, Georgia in the early 80s. The whole town was slowed down. Everyone involved in State College Indie lived in a room in a house and there were house parties all the time. What State College needed, but never got, was an R.E.M., to be a flagship bearer from State College to the world. There were candidates; the best and most popular candidate was a band of which every member was a local icon. They were musically great and very muscular (and as classicist about musical quality as early R.E.M.) but no one in the band could sing. If this band had had a Michael Stipe, the whole movement in State College would've come to the surface much faster.

People were fucking. To the extent that some arts scenes in America have problems with this, State College didn't. The sexual mores were pretty blase about faithfulness and seriousness, too. This extended even to life on campus; North Halls was considered the "artsy" set of dorms, and I lived there for a long time. The idea of doing pick-up routines, hanging around playing music and smoking pot, and grooving on what you were going to do in the arts when you "grew up" was *de rigueur*. What was important was that you could live on campus if you were an artist and still not starve to death spiritually. We all absorbed the 90s ethos, which amounted to a more tortured and world-weary version of the 60s. And most of us listened to the same music. Nirvana weren't too big in State College: Smashing Pumpkins, Radiohead, Sonic Youth, Guided by Voices, the Flaming Lips were all massive. I got into Nick Drake and Big Star on the side. Brit-Pop, particularly Blur, was around.

How did we relate to the football shenanigans? We didn't. We simply acted as if they weren't happening. In North Halls, on South Atherton Street, on West College, you could get away from that crap, and really do it, and mean it. Although visiting East Halls was always a fun education on what it meant to live on the dark side of things.

I enjoyed my philosophy classes, and did well in them. They were a handful of other courses I liked. If I often flaked out on Gen Ed requirements, it's because I was a flake in many ways in those days. Philosophy engaged me; other than that, my mind was possessed by the arts. Or intoxicants. By 1997, they were coffeeshops in State College where, if you knew the right people, you could buy *gooballs* over the counter. Or smoke a joint openly sitting out in the cafe. Bohemia, and the scandals in it. Bohemia styled, also, in a down-home mode for central Pa.

The last six months I spent in State College in '98 were the *happiest*. It was a bacchanal to match anything in Philly, Chicago, NYC or DC. And if no one in the wider world knew or cared that it was happening, we were too young to notice or fret that this was the case. We'd get to that later.



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P.F.S. POST

PHILADELPHIA FRABJOUS

From Seven Corners Poetry (ed. Steve Halle)

A VILLANELLE

I have undone our bent decision laughing sadly.
Between wind and wound, the day pitches down.
We are a replicating setting devoid of greenery,

with hoes, tropes, and our mass machinery
with licensed language but without listening we drone.
I have undone our bent decision laughing sadly

as though to speck electric and forgo our power medley.
We divine to be verbs but end up as proper nouns.
We are a replicating setting devoid of greenery,

trying through the days' languor to talk avidly
of words settling among sheets slipped facedown,
the stillness undone, our bent decision laughing sadly.

An embryonic engineering; an abracadabra of absently
searching the haphazard circuitry of words. Yes, this brown
field is a replicating setting devoid of greenery,

a discord of clouds at our throats, a soured creamery
left hastily for the rush of law, of light, of renown.
Still moving with our bent decision laughing sadly,
we replicate settings devoid of greenery.

© William Allegrezza and Simone Muench 2009

Editor:

- Adam Fieled

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Adam Fieled (State College, Pennsylvania, USA): "Song for Maria"

My scarlet letter let you in
We rallied on our separate beds
The way to blue was flushed with ice
Your tongue possesses everything

(lighten my,
watch my,
blow my)

In any case the case is closed
We walk the streets, a trackless train
My verdant prayer is your own skin
I can't believe I'm free again

Relax—

Ice yr drink—

Think—

Pursue a purpose, lost in flame
Become the scum you dote on, crab
The sky, the ground, the square you are
The realm of flesh is one lone purge...

mercy mercy mercy
mercy mercy

© Adam Fieled 1998

Chris McCabe (Montreal, Quebec/Dagenham, London, UK): "Fragment (undated)"

Debating the relative merits of Orchestral Manoeuvres in The Dark
or Tears for Fears, while April ice melts slowly in Westmount Park.

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Now appears to be less world-shaking than when, Misha G., we both
could be smartly vehement about Richard Rorty, Boy George, Truth,

Logic & being spanked by Marianopolis twins known to us as Ruth.
Not that we were L. Cohen's heirs, but rather a pair of young pioneers

gazing into the future with our smoking jackets for uniforms, sayers
of sooth but more often faux-decadent imbibers of lascivious perfumes,

who often drank tea (before it was Pennyroyal) on mornings as Winter
Dripped away as surely as Youth does— as children, crushed on looms.

If such industrial imagery seems a tad stark, consider the Reagan Years
were also ours in Montreal. We danced: slim Japanese New Wavers,

The Cure & The Smiths our aural neighbours if not allies; felt Time's
Axis turn, as early eloquence (our praxis) dried up in Age's Summer.

© Chris McCabe (?)

**Tammy Armstrong (Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada): "Affair with my Partner
after Spring Haircut/Shave"**

This begins my affair:
this new face in our bed.

Fastidiousness spatchcocked
into shiftless lust
in a basement tavern
where base boys
dance with undergrads.
We drink with blind date enthusiasm.

Treat me proverbial,
chalky with wine & newness,
bringing it all to bed
while he's away on a road trip.

This perennial hook-up
leaves alarm clocks,
toothbrush rituals in the margins.
Back story:
a much younger you,
a .12 gauge, a chipmunk.
The words don't matter at last call.

Take me home in the van—
a box of finishing nails
chattering
in the back,
a weeks worth of Globes & Mails
nested on the passenger seat.

If they ask, tell them—
yes, we left the Chevron
near the Tannery
around three—
a new pack of smokes
paid for from an ambitious wallet.
Clearly, single before tonight.

© Tammy Armstrong 2006

Rosanna Lee (Manhattan, New York): "Shoot the Freak"

The Cyclone rattled its last *rat a tat tat*
roller-coaster shudder two decades ago.
The skeleton still stands as testament to a bygone
New York Jewish era.
The construction crane demolished
the last, wiry matchstick remains,
because at night, it swayed and made
a sing song noise that made them
think it would crash one night and kill someone,
last ligaments brushed away.

Today no one goes to see the freak show. The bearded lady

and somnambulist have shaved and awoken.
The Siamese twins are severed and killed.
Cut the baby in half and the real parent will speak up.
The Wisdom of Solomon is the new freak show.
It's the real parents screaming *cut them, kill one, and leave
me a normal baby for chistsakes!*

Even the circus died. No one's amazed anymore.
The Norwegian trapeze artists and gypsies keep
up the desperate legacy of their sad parents.
The ringmaster parodies himself in mocking bravado.
The elephants stink and are crusty and march in unending circles
with glamorous, glittering ladies who do not seem to exist
even though they're straddling beasts.
Professor Sascha talks to the animals with a long whip, magic,
& the white horses leaping really are so ravishing, tame and wild.
The big tent droops; the crystal ball dulls to wood.

One night a child goes to the circus carnival for the last time.
He fingers the illusion and all the players congeal into waxy ice:
Feather Woman in mid-flip above the net, tiger tamer with his head
in the mad kitty's jaws, the clown mid-tumble with his
shiny shoes on the dusty ground.

© Rosanna Lee 2008

Adam Fieled (editor, Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania): *Equations*: Thesis: Wendy Smith

Here I am in New England, getting killed. It's summer, there's weed around, booze. I'm perched on a ledge, feel I'm being pushed off. Look who's here to visit: Wendy, two years older than me, who has two pieces coming out in *Poetry*. My first major piece has been out two months. We immediately become big shots to each other. Wendy has slightly bronzed skin, brownish hair lightened towards dirty blonde, a voluptuous body but a way of holding herself that suggests she finds her own body embarrassing, somehow unworkable. Yet even her diffidence is enticing; it makes guys want to ram through those defenses. Our equation sinks into place: I'm a young Poundian firebrand, she's got all the spiritualized quirkiness of Emily Dickinson, but with sex appeal. We are standing, having drinks in my room, smoking cigarettes in

the balminess (open windows, flies). There's a party down the hall we abandoned to smoke in peace. Somehow, a wind current comes into the room and does a loop so that the door closes: a minor miracle, or a universe sign concerning what's meant to happen next. It does: I reach over, begin with gropes, which soon turn into kisses. As we go into this, Wendy lets her hair loose from her ponytail. We are two geniuses, kings and queens, and this is within days of Heather, her positing of me as underling. Such is a life in the arts. When a surfeit of symbolic material lands on two souls, they (sometimes) have no choice but to act them out. As I enter her, Wendy becomes a symbol of my own artistic potency, and I of hers.

.....

As I pound away at Wendy, I notice this about her: she's scared of sex. I am on top of her, she clutches my arms with her hands. It's like she thinks I might go crazy if not held back. Her eyes are opened wide and looking into mine, glazed and petrified. I later find out that fear of sex is one of her great poetic themes. But we bang away on this tiny narrow bed with no sheets in this dorm room that must suffice for this ten-day residency. I try Jean's tricks (variations) but nothing works; Wendy's afraid. She's denied the unction of a stream; I'm wearing a condom. This goes on all night, right through the New England summer 4 am sunrise. There is some gruesomeness to wolf-hour sunlight that only New Englanders know. She leaves me and there is poignancy to her leaving because we both know this cannot happen again; we have taken our roles too far. She can't handle the moves that accrue to the life of a big genius and I don't like this diffidence in her parts that hates sex, loathes feelings, wants to curl up underneath a crab shell and close its eyes forever. I'm twenty-nine, and I'm building relationships that are instantly obsolescent. Wendy, for one night, got to be a goddess, and me to be a god, only to find out that we're just more normal people doing that hallowed, time-honored routine: *fake it 'til you make it*.

© Adam Fieled 2011-2023



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P.F.S. POST

PHILADELPHIA FRABJOUS

From *Poetry* (2005)

PARTS OF A STORY

Or, it could go like this, since
you want to know names,
places, people, particulars:

it was the particular paradise
of ninety acres of orchard grass
and a few scattered woods;
barbed wire, Holsteins,
and the plush of spring
as you feel it, wet beneath you,
when you sit down in a field in May—

or in the pasture's folds where the creek ran:
there were ores of a grey clay
she could sit and mine all morning;
rotting trees, whose meat flaked off
like the flesh of fish;
or in the barn where the straw-dust
harried and swirled.

It was in *an inheritance*,
since it was given as all earth is given,
as ready to receive the pledge
of a young girl as the cow-flops
and the dull thud of horses' hooves.

We may start here in this field,

Editor:

- Adam Fieled

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with her kneeling, with the colors wet and black
suddenly pouring up—
but eventually we will have to confront the father,
then the ravishment by air,
then, still later—
the ravishment by imagination.

© Mary Walker Graham 2005

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Leonard Cohen (Montreal, Quebec): from *Beautiful Losers*

*Sail on, sail on, O Ship of State, auto accidents, births, Berlin, cures for cancer!
Listen, my friend, listen to the present, the right now, it's all around us, painted
like a target, red, white, and blue. Sail into the target like a dart, a fluke bull's eye
in a dirty pub. Empty your memory and listen to the fire around you. Don't forget
your memory, let it exist somewhere precious in all the colors that it needs but
somewhere else, hoist your memory on the Ship of State like a pirate's sail, and aim
yourself at the tinkly present. Do you know how to do this? Do you know how to see
the akropolis like the Indians did who never even had one? Fuck a saint, that's how,
find a little saint and fuck her over and over in some pleasant part of heaven, get
right into her plastic altar, dwell in her silver medal, fuck her until she tinkles like
a souvenir music box, until the memorial lights go on for free, find a little saintly
faker like Teresa or Catherine Tekakwitha or Lesbia, whom prick never knew but
who lay around all day in a chocolate poem, find one of these quaint impossible
cunts and fuck her for your life, coming all over the sky, fuck her on the moon with
a steel hourglass up your hole, get tangled in her airy robes, suck her nothing
juices, lap, lap, lap, a dog in the ether, then climb down to this fat earth and slouch
around the fat earth in your stone shoes, get clobbered by a runaway target, take
the senseless blows again and again, a right to the mind, piledriver on the heart,
kick in the scrotum, help! help! it's my time, my second, my splinter of the shit
glory tree, police, fire men! Look at the traffic of happiness and crime, it's burning
in crayon like the akropolis rose! And so on...*

© Leonard Cohen 1967

Chris McCabe (London, UK): "Premeet"

Eight minutes to a meeting I don't want to be at
 lingering at stool in the white room
my dad would have written his dream England XI
 I want to make a poke at a poem
 —one likeable Larkin take: to write what
you would want to read—
 but there's always games on mobile phones
 DETAILS next to DELETE
 thumbs like fitting seals
CLOSING APPLICATION
 two minutes to go—
 was it Parkinson or Aspel
 who shadowboxed pre-guests?

Cicatrix of papercuts makes this need to confess

© Chris McCabe 2006

Chris McCabe (London, UK): from *Progress Poems*

800: ivor cutler

see you next time he said I said not
if I'm like this (turned my back) he
said then I'll be like this (turned his
back) & there might be mirrors in front of us

he said there might be mirrors in front of us
I said not if I'm like this (turned my
back) he said then I'll be like this
(turned his back) see you next time I said

659: cleaning habits

& for some— to wash & clean up— is to
piss their own shit-stains from the toilet pan

P.F.S.: *Nine Paintings 2*

Though the formal aspect of Abby Heller-Burnham's work is indebted to French Neo-Classical Ingres and David, the thematic narratives embedded in her paintings, which hinge on usages of humor, irony, and rhetorical incisiveness, owe a surprising debt to post-modernity, and the conceptual post-modern art which has dominated NYC's Chelsea galleries for several decades. Specifically, Abby's narratives of the body, of femininity, and of queerness do the post-modern trick of moving past form to reach unadulterated thematic goals. Why the formal components which complicate Heller-Burnham's paintings also add several more narratives (of aesthetic form itself, of aesthetic histories, and of America establishing a new, form-driven discourse with historical Europe), completing a well-rounded package which has in it the insignia balance and major high art consonance of the Philly Free School, is that we all, in Aughts Philly, argued that narratives of form itself are as interesting and as rich as thematic narratives, and created accordingly, against the American sanctioned and normative. Yet, the chiasmus which presents itself here between New York and Philadelphia has its own level of richness, and its own narrative—specifically, about form and formal rigor, and why, at a certain point, early in the new century, a group of American artists decided to investigate past what was indigenously in our blood, towards an embrace of the historical.

Abby's *Meeting Halfway* takes us right into the heart and the heat of the New York-Philly chiasmus and conflict— a painting which grants equal time and attention to concept and form, establishing an essential multi-tiered narrative in the process. About queerness, what *Meeting Halfway* establishes is a sense of nuanced, practical particulars— Abby and her twin/muse only partly face each other as they emerge from their respective pupas, into— what? Respective adulthood? Sexual awareness? Consonance with a queer vision of life? As Abby and her muse “meet halfway,” their matching postures are ambiguous— they are bare-breasted, but covering their breasts. How I take the essential thematic narrative of the painting is that it defines a sense of isolation, alienation, and “half-sisterhood” among gay women. Here, the formal narrative is rather raw for Heller-Burnham— yet the graceful sense of added ornaments softens the construct, and the expert drawing and coloration fills it out into balanced major high art consonance. Yet, I can't not notice that Robert Mapplethorpe is in Heller-Burnham's blood somewhere here— the awareness that queerness in art necessitates confrontation, and that queer alienation and intimacy are so oddly entwined as to be (or become) interchangeable. The boldness and

bluntness of *Meeting Halfway* is very New York— it amounts to a declaration, both of queer independence and queer complexity. Mapplethorpe does similar tricks, with even more phallic boldness and bluntness— but his formal narrative is a minor one compared to Abby's, and creates a sense of impoverishment around his work. Indeed, Mapplethorpe's impoverishment is New York's— incomplete or inadequate narratives of form, and a totalized reliance on theme and thematic (conceptual) narratives, without explanation of why form needs to auto-destruct.

P.F.S.: *Nine Paintings*

In the continuum of visual art, an oeuvre of nine paintings is not particularly significant unless the nine paintings happen to be masterpieces. With American painter Abby Heller-Burnham, [this appears to be the case](#). The limited oeuvre here on display encompasses a dazzling array of formal and thematic material— precise attention to painterly nuance and detail balanced with an idiosyncratic (intermittently “queer”) vision of urban life in early twenty-first century America. A painting like *The Skaters* embodies this vision— the moody chiaroscuro of the scene, its ambience of desolation, which is a specifically urban (in this case, Philadelphian) ambience; balanced with meticulous formal execution which is nonetheless skewered against conventional painterly representation; create a complex construct which is too formal to be aligned with post-modernism, but also both too dark and too strange to be aligned with middle-of-the-road pictorial art.

To be short; *The Skaters*, and Heller-Burnham's other masterpieces, are something new under the sun. All are illuminated by the painter's keen and quirky sense of multiple meanings, of representations whose import multiplies when observed closely and carefully. *The Walls Have Ears* presents a maze of possible meanings and levels of interpretation— the most obvious level concerns sexualized love between women; but the picture finds many ways of being queer, as the games it plays with identities and perspectives are blisteringly intense and complex. It's a complexity which doesn't disavow absurdist humor and irony. Compared with what is typically seen in New York galleries, it is a narrative feast. Many of these paintings are narrative feasts— *The Lost Twins* could be taken as an art-related allegory, or a critique of allegories; a humorous indictment of the process of artistic canonization, or a humorous portrayal of the artist's vulnerability in the face of time and canonization; a self-portrait, or a parody of self-portraits; or all of these things at once. Closure is defiantly rejected.

This is what Heller-Burnham's paintings have which has frequently been missing from New York art; a sense of absolute formal and thematic richness, and of

boundlessness in richness, resultant from the exercise of intense (newly, American) imagination. *On the Other Hand* is a narrative feast in another direction— the social mores of American “indie” culture meeting the transcendental religiosity of Renaissance painting. The juxtaposition is bizarre, and uncanny— it collapses many centuries together in a novel way, to lampoon hipster culture; but this lampoon is executed with the absolute technical authority and mastery of the Renaissance masters themselves, and so winds up transcending its status as a lampoon. Not since Picasso has a visual artist fulfilled this many imperatives at once— that the painter is female, and queer, is a triumph both for American art and American feminism. Yet, Heller-Burnham’s scope as an artist is too broad to be tied wholesale either to formalism, the American (in its novel Philadelphian form) or queer politics— as with all superior artists, there is a universality to her creations broad enough to align her with the most durable humanism. If the oeuvre of her masterworks is small, it is a smallness which the paintings themselves belie— each painting represents an incision into the aesthetic consciousness of the West in 2025. Like Picasso, Heller-Burnham has her way of enacting phallocentrism— and her uncompromising originality is as brutish in its sharpness. Heller-Burnham not only enacts, but is, an American artistic revolution. And she must be here to stay.

Mary Walker Graham (Boston/Virginia, USA): "On the Banks of the River in Winter"

So many Marys grieving by the river
that I have to cover my ears
to shut out the sobbing and hear,

as if for the first time,
the long low sound of the water
and the train just beginning

to round the bend and blow
its way through the dark tunnel.
How many times I've sat

in summer: considered the chicory,
drawn the blue bridge flung
from bank to bank, or wondered

the names of the red flowers,
their throats like trumpets.
How many times I've not

given in to the weeping:
I can almost *see* her— the one
who lifts the Potomac mud

to her face and smears,
as if it were a balm and not
the original problem,

or the one with the bucket of fish:
she should return them but that would mean
letting them slip, silver and whole,

finally cast out. I'd rather
let them wander in the maples,
cold and insistent and crying.

I should swim somehow— wait
for spring; I've been waving
to that other a long time,

the one who wears the red
and not the blue scarf.

© Mary Walker Graham 2008

William Allegrezza (Indiana, USA): "distances"

for lori

across darkened expanses where dolphins reign
counters cry the numbers to sleep
across specious words lined along arches that
bloom water itself is new
across space that expands with images of tubers
in growth is light falling from eyes forming circles
across two moments of here in place and
stumbling forward you subtle beautiful alive

© William Allegrezza 2007

originally published in The Bedside Guide to No Tell Motel anthology

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P.F.S. POST

PHILADELPHIA FRABJOUS

Barnaby Smith (New South Wales, Australia): "Docklands"

On a first visit to Dublin
the East Wall Road drags you
along with the winter sun. Man
at the traffic lights with his
family: he was at the film last
night, the film whose spirit
we are quietly clinging to. His
daughter's hair, made up of angles,
adjusts as she sways with her
father's cigarette smoke. She and I
are getting to know the puddles,
both improvisers in terrain. She and
I are taking it seriously.

© Barnaby Smith 2017

first published in fourWtwenty-eight

Cleveland Wall (Bethlehem, Pa, USA): "Midge"

Because what's the fun of being Barbie
without the plain friend? You can take her
shopping, make her look pretty but not
as pretty as you— never as pretty
as you— and that's the beauty of it!
Barbie's wholesome freckled friend
does not resemble a gnat in that

Editor:

- Adam Fieled

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she serves a vital purpose in the game:
the beta foil that makes the alpha
shine the brighter. She may content
herself with the occasional dig about
intellect or bleach, whether or not
she's any smarter or less prone
to artifice. What of it? A silvery laugh,
a toss of the long hair and the whiff
of rancor is gone, leaving just
the faintest smudge on the windscreen
of a fast pink convertible.

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Adam Fieled (editor, Plymouth Meeting, USA): "Apparition Poem #2044"

What if, really & truly,
the God that made us
was beneath us? What if
we emerged from ooze,
call it primordial, that was
itself a matrix for an eternity
of half-made garbage, & one
millennium, the entire universe
just slipped out— an accident?
There we were, all of us, at 1.0,
those elite-brained imposing
spatial-temporal dimensions
on time, space. Pygmies, also,
pushed down towards tiny
existences, hating 1.0 very much,
as an enemy like taxes, always there—

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In Memory: Larry Sawyer (Chicago!) 1970-2025

*As if there was a man who wore the
mask of a man and that man
noticed behind the mask that there
were shadows covering the earth
like semesters. The man realized he
had a lot to learn. So he studied the
tongues of the shadows as they
spoke a language he'd never heard.
At night they sang the most
intricately embroidered songs.*

*Perhaps there was a refrigerator in the
sky that he rode to forget himself,
this man who exhaled librarians.
Day and night he read the
silence, cutting his throat with
syllogisms. Butterflies burst forth from his
calamari as he ate it. He noted these
details lazily and continued with his
reverent stroking of the sun.*

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P.F.S. POST

PHILADELPHIA FRABJOUS

MF of A Revenge: On Steve Halle

Editor:

- Adam Fieled

Many of the poems in Steve Halle's first full-length collection, *Map of the Hydrogen World*, are poems I have been acquainted with for years. I did my MFA with Steve, and the poems in this book have been gestating, mutating, and forming a cohesive gestalt since we graduated in 2006. Steve actually sent me this collection, in manuscript form, some time ago. Thus, the central features of *Map*; playful irreverence, measured absurdity, Pop culture *sprezzatura*, and a dollop of world-weary angst that lends the construct, as a whole, a cutting edge; are not a surprise to me. But now (2009) Cracked Slab Books, a Chicago endeavor spearheaded by William Allegrezza and Raymond Bianchi, have packaged Steve's poems in a gorgeous, glossy edition, and it lends an air of formality and permanence to the whole thing, so that I have been able to absorb the poems again, as if for the first time. The book posits itself as "shun(ning) the divide between post-avant and Official Verse Culture poetics," and I have no qualm with this designation: it is apropos to what seems to me to be the endeavor/enterprise of Chicago poetry. Chicago, as a lit locale, walks a fine line between these schisms, and "uncategorizable," in the context of Chicago poetics, is a badge of honor.

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Of course, this might be a moot point, because Steve is currently located in

Bloomington (previously in Palatine), several hours outside the Windy City. Yet I am willing to make the metonymic association, because *Map* slots in aptly to an ethos that I locate in Chicago. In any case, labels, appellations, and designations aside, it may be apropos to get down to brass tacks with this collection, if we want to ascertain what makes it tick, and maybe unearth a clue as to how Amer-Po can do what Steve wants it to do: shun the divides, take the high road, blaze a new trail without any rote categorical assumption to go along with it, and, maybe most relevantly, have a damned good time doing it (*Beat, not beat*). I hope my readers will pardon me for assuming an editor's privilege and opening with a piece that myself published, in *Ocho #11*. This is an epistolary prose poem, from what Steve calls his "e-mail" series, all of which I have found remarkable for their vibrancy, high-

October 2005 November 2005 December 2005 January 2006 February 2006 March 2006 April 2006 May 2006 July 2006 August 2006 January 2007 February 2007 March 2007 April 2007 May 2007 June 2007 July 2007 August 2007 November 2007 December 2007 January 2008 February 2008 March 2008 April 2008 May 2008 June 2008 July 2008 October 2008 November 2008 December 2008 February 2009 March 2009 April 2009 May 2009 December 2009 July 2016 November 2016 January 2017 February 2017 June 2017 April 2020 May 2020 July 2020 September 2020 October

wire chutzpah, and modish dedication to expressing the spontaneity of consciousness. This is entitled yao:

dear Jackson Pollock's memory, oh well i tend to agree with the crying/passion/exhaustion argument but you've put me in a tough spot yet again. living with the enemy of our undefined yet common belief sys. don't worry abt being defensive and btw it's molehills but n e ways. what r u signing my year book or something? and this faculty meeting day makes me want to quit my job idealistically like student in Updike short story "A & P" and are we just going to become vagrants? & is that all of "what's left" to do? and and and listen to Brahms 4th like I kno what tha fuck he means? and listen to jazz like I kno wtf? and read like I no wtf? and write things so obscure even me the transparent eyeballed creator doesn't know wtf they it all means? I guess the point was I'm tired right now tired like not go to sleep tired but tired in other ways and ways I can't defend or argue abt but it might just be time to lay low & there are no readily avail. times on any foreseen horizons for such lazy nonsensical endeavors. On the floor I am more at ease, I feel nearer. I'm better at buying books than reading them but they don't and I don't understand why not they don't pay you for that more likely opp. and i know what's-his-name sd steal this book and all that but i don't feel like being cooped up either. I mn either. an epic struggle between man and material might unfold. lots of luck, honey. love, not chaos, s

The first, and perhaps most interesting thing to unpack about this piece is its dedication, to "Jackson Pollock's memory." What I take the privilege of reading in is that Steve's compositional strategy here is an ekphrastic rendering of an Abstract Expressionist, "all-over" composition. It's painterly. The level of intensity is sustained throughout, and evenly distributed, so that there are no focal points and no rhetorical crescendos that stand out: the piece is one long crescendo. The bizarre, jagged grammar heightens the impression of "go on your nerve" spontaneity, and the whole thing practically screams *O'Hara*. However, the darkling overtones of pessimism and weariness ("I'm tired right now like not go to sleep tired but tired in other ways...") keep the piece from being a complete joy-ride. What we have here is a companion persona to the standard (and now standardized) *O'Hara* persona: let's say this is *O'Hara's* hetero, cynical, bitter-but-bristling-with-feeling first cousin. "Cousin Steve" doesn't quite work; perhaps "Cousin Halle" would do the trick. Notice all the culture-signifiers sprinkled throughout: first Pollock, then Brahms and Updike (RIP); this is *haute* poetry. Yet it features an uncertain protagonist who can't come to grips with his own cultural-Mandarin status: "and and and listen to Brahms 4th like I kno what tha fuck he means? and listen to jazz like I kno wtf?" What do I like most about this poem? It is, for want of a better word, fun; a rollicking good time, a helluva spry ride. There is a freshness here that cannot be faked, a sense of urgency

that can only come in a *spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings* (leeches being gathered on the metaphoric moor). More-than-organic sensibility gets hit with a Po-Mo slice-and-dice, and we travel along the abraded lines of a just-short-of train-wreck. On a more sober note, we do have some concrete clues about "Cousin Halle"; he is a teacher, though at what level the poem does not say. All-in-all, despite the surface jocularity and the dis-ease beneath, this is a strangely complete picture of a comprehensive poetic consciousness, circa early XXI century. "Love, not chaos" is wished, but not provided for the reader, who receives, I would say, equal amounts of both. My other favorite from this series is *epistrophic*:

dear magellan, the epistrophic changes. epistrophy is epistrophe. would you rather you were the bull, the matador, the red sheet or the killing spear? would you rather be turning toward diving ground? or on divine ground turning? have you discovered the act of discovery? are you that kind of discovery or circumnavigation? earth-- the shell of the turtle? has the act of discovery helped you to be discovered? has the art of discovering others who have made discoveries been the discovery? is discovery of others in the act of discovering others who discovered others before them, cowering in their own bewilderment, been the discovery you have been seeking? the same melodic material same material, melodic, is repeated is incantatory is repeated is repeated at different pitches at opposing pitches at similar pitches in the pitch of the moment in the pitch of a line of phrase is repeated in the cigarette smell on the black finger on the key the smell of the key is incantatory is repeated in the moment when the pianist who is no pianist who is no piano who has the key but is not the key smells the ivory, chanting, thrumming the key(s) feels the charge of the bull elephant in musth? the increasing tension tense taut taught like piano wire? thrumming tension in the electrical wires over the strata of fields of mind-artist deep in creation madness? do you? feel? that way? letmeknowyouranswer, s

This poem takes its strength from strategic redundancies that do, in fact, raise it to the level of the "incantatory." Usually, incantatory poems are in service of something, of some great point the poet wants to make: Shelley's grand co-existence with Nature in *West Wind*, Whitman's elaborate enumeration of individuality in *Song of Myself* (and use of anaphora, picked up by Ginsberg, among others, who is Steve's home-boy), even going back to the devotional lyrics of Herbert. Here, in very po-mo fashion, the redundancies and repetitions are placed in the poem, and named in the poem, self-consciously (i.e. Steve actually uses the word "incantatory"). This makes for an interesting scenario, perhaps the rough equivalent of John Cage's minutes of silence; poetic music (melopoeia) not in the service of anything, self-consciously presented. Does this make it empty? Not any more empty than *Tender Buttons* (*stick stick sticking, sticking to a chicken*). Not if we are happy to replace nouns with adjectives. "Discover," actually appears in a bunch of different forms, and seems to

be the primary redundancy. Yet Halle makes the melopoeia issue explicit by bringing in the piano and the pianist at the end. After this, we know (mostly) what the poem is: music for its own sake, and to its own ends, "thrummy" hypnotically so as to put the reader into a trance-like state.

This, the poem does, or did for me. Music about music, words over words, a classic case of the meta-poem deconstructing itself before our eyes. Not as much fun as *yao*, but perhaps more seriously intended, more apt to make an important point; that art (music, poetry) is what we say it is, and nothing more. "Let me know your answer," Steve says, but in this case no answer is necessary; it is written into the poem: art is self-subsistent. *Map of the Hydrogen World* is filled with these little moments of reckoning, which turns what could be pure fun into something more serious. That, to me, is its importance; it allows us a textual good time (what Steve tends to see in Allen G), without ever quite letting us off the hook. Is art self-subsistent? Who has to justify works of art? The "transparent eyeballed creator"? The rapt audience? The passionate e-mailer? For breaking down the boundaries of the aesthetic, all the while keeping his eye on the ball of total enjoyment, Steve Halle deserves his very own Jackson Pollock, stolen from MOMA (or perhaps a Nauman neon from PMA?) and delivered to his door.

Desmond Swords: MF of A

Bob Sheppard's Star Student Scott Desmond's Words Flyte Fielded,

Yes, yes, one read the pose by this 'poet, critic, and musician' colleague, currently where erm, you were a year ago, nearing the end of that long hard road to attainment as a pro in doctoral po-biz, Jeff - collegiately alleging a claim that nearly everything to follow *Four Quartets* has been 'dross'.

One chuckled at the ambition, audacity and foolishness of deploying such a term in the forum of *Letters*; before turning one's focus to adducing the verse and other critical prose essays by the author Adam attempting to pull off such a theatrically audacious play as this.

*"She told me I love boy/girl poems, love scenes
in them based on a deep degeneracy
inherited from too much heat around my
genitals, as manifest in tangents I could only
see if I was getting laid. She told me this as*

*I was getting laid in such a way that any notion
of telling was subsumed in an ass as stately as
a mansion, which I filled with the liquid
cobwebs of my imagination."*

Yeats would be proud of the cant and ergo argoist, very very classy Adam Fieled's verse. Proper spillage. High Art indeed from our playboy crown-prince doing what one does.

Effecting agreement among this reader, on X and Y being the only two one is on collegiate amity and perfect accord with Adam about, as a bosom buddy chum and prophetic practitioner with the imbas to know why, when, what and how, for example, Eliot can successfully operate as a symbol for agreement between Fieled and oneself.

High and Low Art in the 'making' of verse activity, you know, as a 'poetry'— there's often very little agreement about, and in America, poetry atomized into 10,000 different individual, unique and original practices, all curated by a genius with big ideas about what kind of reality Poetry is, adam, the only critical debate in AmPo parish at present, as you know, has one essential point of agreement most practitioners of contemporary American poetry found as your datum: MFA.

After this, a forking occurs and we diverge into our own pool of plod and production sailor, not believing any of it matters. That our thinking is nought but a performance in print, anything other than that: Not real. Thought, Fielding.

Have a think about it. I'll get back to you.

More Apps (MF of A?) action in [Eratio Postmodern Poetry](#).

Chris McCabe: Literature Online

What the web offers is instantaneousness. If somebody should want to read my poetry they don't have to find out the publication details, publisher, ISBN, order the book and wait for it to arrive on their mat. I can give them a URL, mail them a link, and it's there in front of them asking for no VISA details. The speed is there without the comfort. What's often forgotten with books though is just what amazing pieces of technology they actually are. Diverse, compact, portable: I don't leave home without one. For me, both forms of publication bring different possibilities and it's never been a case of one against the other. The physical feel of a book (colour, weight, smell, sensations, portability) are certainly not threatened by a monitor and a clunk of plastic in your hand. What the internet does offer though is not only a

potentially much larger readership (especially compared to small print-runs of magazines) but also a much wider one. Online communities are based upon shared interests to the detriment of other obstacles, such as location, physical appearance and even language. What I've also found fascinating is the experience of somebody latching onto a poem because they are interested in its subject - its straightforward content - and not just because it is a poem. They would never have looked inside a poetry magazine or book to find it in the first place. Where your poems could only be browsed in book form, they can now be searched and weeded out by people with massively different interests. It's also worth pointing out to poets who are skeptical of poetry on the internet (who won't of course, be reading this) that there is a whole generation coming through who will look to the internet to find about contemporary poets. If you don't Google, you don't exist. Personally, I'm always hugely satisfied with being published online. No more or less than in book form. It means somebody's liked my work enough to go to the effort of getting it out there and that it then has the potential to be read by people. After the initial buzz of writing something you're happy with, these are the two most important things for a writer. Or should be anyway.

Gabriel Gudding: Delusion

GG: Most poetry is a kind of verbal costume. An ideational schmaltz. An emotional uniform. A mental getup. This is just as true for avant garde and post-avant work as it is for mainstream stuff. Though I don't think the costumed life or the costumed mind is peculiar to poetry, necessarily, as a genre, it's no secret poetry tends more toward stylization than other modes. Poetry is the country music of literature. Given to schmaltz, nostalgia, over extension, socio-emotional reactivity, and alienation from material reality. The flipside is the hipster reaction to this: flaff, whathaveyou, langpo, N/Oulipian generativity (hipster maximalist masculinist compulsive text generation), irony as a modal approximation of self-awareness, and a conflation of experiment in form with soi-disant radical politics (the result being merely a more extravagant quietism). Our capacity for delusion is almost total.

AF: OK. I'm curious to what extent these kind of thoughts might have directed the composition of R.I.N. You include heaping gobs of concrete particulars: times, distances, amounts of gas, temperatures, highway and town names. Do you feel that these details "naturalize" the book somehow, give it stable/solid/palpably non-delusional roots, out of country (perhaps), into something rock-like?

GG: Good question. Not sure if they're less delusional but I can say they are less stylized. Maybe they do something not often done in poetry. These are the local

details of your average person's world, least ways of my world. I wanted to include that stuff. Just the attempt to write the in-between, overlooked, peripheral— as a part of the greater truths, larger narratives, and more overt emotionality of most poetry. Not sure if these elements naturalize the book, but my hope is the sum total makes for a book that does not much move via typical poetry modalities. There is that huge long section around page 90 or so where I wrote down ALL the signs I saw from Ohio through Indiana and into Illinois. Horrifying. We *READ* all that stuff: it affects us. It moves us. It makes us. We need to become aware of that. I feel it needs to be in our literature. It is an important part of our disgusting history. I really do conceive of the book as a history. My daughter Clio was named for the muse of history. The book is dedicated to her.

Philly Free School: Philly Free School

When language is used as texture, as a constituent part of a spectacle that also includes sound and images, the audience (ideally) feels itself immersed or engulfed in a dynamic collage; as such, this kind of performance is an extension of the Modernist ethos. Fractured things can be more compelling than wholes; this was one tenet that motivated Pound, Eliot, and the rest. For an audience, sitting in a darkened room (and the Highwire offered two main spaces, a conventional gallery space and a warehouse space), this sense of brokenness could be interpreted many ways, but the essential thing for us was to present something that was dynamic, rather than static. The most elaborate of these presentations involved music, images, and poetry at once; while it would be reasonable to question whether the total effect was bombastic or not, the responses we received encouraged us to believe that what we were doing was significantly more exciting than an average poetry performance. Live poetry, I would argue, only works as texture to begin with; it is in the mix of things that live poetry comes alive. In the specific performances that I was personally involved with, I did, in fact, read entire poems; if I had it to do over again, I would not. It would have been substantially more appropriate to read fragments or even to improvise. The video collages were put together from foreign movies, Internet, music video, and photography bits. The musical elements alone were entirely improvised. Although I am proud of what the Philly Free School accomplished, it was merely a beginning. Thinking about it now, we could have been much more rigorous. We did what we could with limited resources.

What would a completely successful poetry spectacle, in the Artaudian sense, look like? Artaud, of course, became famous for his idea/ideal of the Theater of Cruelty; a spectacle that confronts an audience with its own mortality, in an unflinching,

persistent way. What kind of poetry fragments could add, textually, to such a spectacle? It seems to me that the poetry would have to be written specifically in conjunction with, specifically for, the music and the images. They would have to function, in other words, *dramatically*, as carriers of a certain kind of drama, just as dialogue in a theater production does. What can poetry contribute that mere dialogue cannot? Poetry has in its arsenal a capacity for incantatory power that dialogue does not; an ability to build, to create rhythms, melodies, and cadences that dialogue cannot. Anaphora is one method by which this kind of fragment could work; rhyme is another. This is texture that creates stimulation; with other elements, the potentiality for genuine spectacle, cohesive spectacle (rather than naïve, haphazard spectacle) arises. As to what the spectacle addresses, there is no real limitation, other than the impulse to compel attention, hold it, and overwhelm at once. Certainly the apocalyptic conflicts in the Middle East, our flagging domestic economy, and the status of the environment are all fertile (pardon my irony) ground.

The whole shebang. And a compendium of P.F.S. miscellany.

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At the beginning of the Aughts in Philadelphia, I attempted to found an artist's co-op, to stage multi-media art events around Philadelphia. I called the first co-op This Charming Lab. It met with limited success. By the middle of the Aughts, the situation had ripened. I now had the man power and venues to stage the events I wanted to stage, which would involve multi-media, around ideas and interpretations of Artaud, the Theater of Cruelty, and what could be made of Artaudian spectacle with the resources at hand. My essential partnership in the initial-model Philly Free School was with three fellow artists: Mike Land, Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum, and Nick Gruberg. Matthew Stevenson and Hannah Miller also proved to be invaluable. Abby Heller-Burnham, Mary Evelyn Harju, and Jenny Kanzler all contributed as tangent artists. As of the early Teens, I began to use Philly Free School as a moniker employed to cover my entire cultural life in Aughts Philadelphia. This created a context for Abby, Mary, and Jenny to be representatively Free School artists, as well. Not to mention, those who had participated in Free School events in Chicago and New York, and everyone who had been published in Philly Free School Post (P.F.S. Post). Why Philly Free School acts as a correlative to Neo-Romanticism and the Creatrix is that it is, to be obvious, based in Philadelphia. On a less obvious note, "Free" and "School" together are meant to imply a group of artists on a vision quest, past the confines of post-modernity, multi-culturalism, and academic feminism, to learn what keys will turn what locks where so as to establish a maximum sense of residency in the most spacious, loft-like socio-aesthetic, socio-sexual, and generally socio-cultural rooms; to know, if it will be known, the boundless. Then, to begin to define the formal parameters of

boundlessness in art, if they can or will be defined. And not bypass the imperative to grasp what might be boundless in human life and thought, too.

Chris McCabe: Humor

I've never really thought of myself as using humor, in the sense of a deliberate, literary device which attempts to have an effect on a reader. It seems obvious to me that poems that set out to be funny, once you've identified the poet's intentions, fall flat and fail. The traditional vehicle for the 'humorous poem' is narrative, which doesn't interest me at all: I'm much more interested in fusing together the seemingly disparate, crude bathos, clashes of cultural registers and any other shock tactics that can, first and foremost, surprise me as the writer. Dr. Johnson's comment that Donne took "the most heterogeneous ideas and yoked together by violence" is relevant here. Being from Liverpool (a city famous for its humor) and writing poetry, strangely doesn't offer any legacy in terms of a more challenging poetics. The territory ends with McGough and The Mersey Poets and all that ponytailed twee-ness. A lot of my poems seems to come about through the making of a connexion, for example George W. Bush & the Wizard of Oz, which interests me more than attempting to get a laugh. Obviously, humor can be used as a kind of survival tactic (certainly in Liverpool, a blinker against the memory of the slave trade), a communal ethic of moving on. There's no great theory to this, but things are either funny to me because they make me laugh or because it generates a response against something that scares the living shit out of me. It was only five days after the recent London bombings when I heard the first joke made about it on television. It was a huge tension reliever. In this sense, the politic poems that I've written have probably used humor as a way of dealing with The Fear.

Philly Free School: Philly Free School

An audience at a standard poetry reading is offered an anti-spectacle— a single man or woman, reading from sheets or a book, often looking down at this book while intermittently gazing up at his or her audience. Why look at something or someone static, and (for the most part) inexpressive? This is the first level of impoverishment. Then, as to the contents of poems read in a public context: are most poems compelling enough, as works of literature, to merit public airing? The truth is that most serious poems do not read that well out loud— poems (good ones) contain enormous amounts of compressed data, which necessitates slow, ocular engagement.

Lines that need to be read three or four times to be properly processed pass with such rapidity, in a reading context, that they might as well be Greek as English. Moreover, attendees have two options— to make an earnest attempt to understand things instantly, or to drift off into reverie. The latter has consistently been my choice (and I have, fortunately or unfortunately, sat through dozens of readings).

But the Philly Free School artists (of which I was one) started from the presupposition that poetry could be mixed with Artaud; that public poetry is, in fact, better as a side-dish than as a main course; and that the possibilities of “spectacles” were (and remain) more exciting than more conventional poetry contexts. As such, the Philly Free School shows (which were well-attended but received little media coverage) presented, in general, little in the way of conventional poetry performances; poetry was mixed with video and music to create novel effects. I was proud to contribute to these performances, because they had not only young energies but principles behind them. While I would not deny that results were mixed (some ideas came off, some did not), I have yet to see another concentrated attempt to make poetry multi-media in a public forum. We were using artful language as *texture*, the way a painter might use brushstrokes, and an inquiry into this usage (language-as-texture) revealed untapped possibilities as regards making poetry interesting to audiences, who may find poetry uninteresting to begin with.

Bob Perelman: Rhetoric

AF: Lately I've been messing around with the concept *rhetopoeia*. This, for me, is the rhetorical impact of any given poem, how it convinces us of its own substantiality. Do you think poems need this sort of justification? Does a poem need to convince us, on a rhetorical level, that it is somehow necessary or justified in its existence?

BP: I'm suspicious of generalizations. I've used the word "rhetoric" a bunch— rhetoric as a source of poetic power. But it's one of the easiest words to misunderstand. Rhetoric is also a synonym of "bullshit!" But rhetoric in the old sense— structures used in addressing a single person, or a group of people, or a situation, when that's what rhetoric means— remains crucial. The environments in which poems exist are so complicated and fast moving that sometimes when every poem is "convincing us of its own substantiality," it feels like endless playings of the authenticity card. Like in "Confession": "Come on and read me for the inner you I've locked onto with my cultural capital sensing-device looks..." Sometimes the best rhetoric (in the sense that I think you're using it) is not worrying about rhetoric. But poems never escape the environment of reading and writing. So, no final answer to the question.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis: Futility

I would say that suffering and fragility (your words) are close to feelings I have about some of the themes of the work, but this is combined with a resilience, resistance, and even a rather inflected joy and awe. “Futility” is your word. I think there is a lot of futility in life, even, in some moods, in all of it, but I couldn’t myself get involved in the 20 year long construction of a poem thinking to communicate sheer futility. The tragic sense of life, the sense of sublimity and rage, is different from futility, after all. Another of the words you use is “must be”— what poetry “must be.” Poetry, to be worth something, evokes many, many feelings in readers: structural feelings of pleasure and dastardliness, feelings of being overwhelmed by the force of language, a sense of leaping forward into a world and being contained in relation to the large world by the smaller world made in and by the poem. There is a lot of pleasure in the artfulness of art, even if some of the feelings evoked by a work are overwhelmingly difficult and sad and hard to manage. Hence, I don’t think that all poetry must be “suffering.” I can’t wrap myself around that generalization.



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P.F.S. POST

PHILADELPHIA FRABJOUS

Andrew Duncan: Oxytocin

Editor:

- Adam Fieled

I used to have this experience with someone incredibly well-informed who would lecture me, late at night, about a hormone oxytocin, linked to trustfulness, suckling, orgasm, and internal pressure control and the release of fluids. I think she may have been making a point about how untrustworthy I was; but how much I might have learnt if I'd been able to stay awake. I always got confused and called it "oxytoxin." Oxytocin is the messenger which makes fish release roe, or spawn, vascular pressure displacing the ocean. So we're talking about a blissful regression in which we immerse and become weightless, the inner and outer waters flow together, and the ocean itself becomes a sexual medium, in which spates of precious fluids form spirals and constellations, sight is replaced by ripples flowing along the skin, personal identity and the time sense disappear. I can never remember this clearly. Sandor Ferenczi wrote a book Thalassa which says that we turn into fish during coupling. I thought it was nonsense. Fish?

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Contributors

- Adam Fieled



Chard deNiord: Yeats

Yeats' poetry spans several decades, beginning in the first half of his career during the last decade of the 19th century with an idyllic Irish muse that morphed after meeting Pound just prior to WWI, his breakup with Maude, and then his marriage to George into his great second career in which his obsession with magic transformed into not just A Vision but his great poems of loss, apocalypse, and political elegy, despite his fascist sympathies. He transcended Edwardian manners and propriety with a vatic sensibility that combined Irish mythology with Modernist imagery and themes. This is very cursory. But there you have enough to see how Procrustean it would be to call Yeats merely Edwardian. And how dare you question whether I have anything intelligent to say about Yeats? Just kidding. Say it all you want. So: a few final words about Yeats. He doesn't have to be Edwardian, just as he doesn't have to

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be Victorian per se in the first half of his career, although he certainly has traits of both. But in his case the parts simply don't add up to make wholes in either case. He's too anomalous, sometimes in an egregious way, to be Victorian. Edwardian, or Modernist. Pretty sui generis. So why are literary aegis tags necessary, especially with regard to poets like Yeats and Frost? And I guess I'd add Hardy too. Such tags are tails wagging the dogs. Let 'em go.

Steve Halle: Indeterminacy

"Indeterminacy" in poetry, it seems to me, is another big point of contention among experimentalists today, and I would assert that Keats' negative capability is the concept which paved the way for indeterminate poetics. I believe a relationship exists between the misinterpretation of "first thought, best thought" and the misuse of negative capability. People like to assume that Ginsberg, Kerouac and the Beats meant "first word, best word" or "first draft, best draft" and use their teachings, which are highly formulated methods for improvisational poetry, to justify writing whatever comes to mind. As we see with Bukowski, a poet who edited little (if at all), this work sometimes succeeds, often falls flat. The same is true for indeterminate poets whose work lacks closure. I think some poets misuse negative capability or "rejection of closure" as a means to avoid thinking about their work. Poets who misuse negative capability think they can avoid essence, substance and arrival, but I think this is a big mistake because it fools poets into thinking they don't need intention or investigation to inhere, and can operate solely on intuition.

Keats is also perhaps the first poet to address the idea that language is unsatisfactory for expressing ideas completely (though Shelley suggested this too). As skilled as any poet may be as word-smith, the poem will still be inadequate to the thing-in-itself: be it the real triggering element of the poem or some abstract or intense thought or sensation the poet tries to grasp. Through negative capability and his understanding of the powers of and limitations of art, Keats may have been the earliest antecedent to the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets of this century. Language poets, of course, understood the fallibility of linguistic expression, so they began to work with language the way a painter might work with paints, allowing for pure linguistic abstraction and/or frustration, depending on whose side you're on. Critics sometimes call Keats a "mood" poet, meaning that every single word did not have to make total logical sense in the poem. Instead, Keats' linguistic consistency depended upon creating the desired mood, a different way of hitting the just note: *le mot juste*.

Previous to Lang-po, I look at Keats as having laid the groundwork for the High Modernists, especially Wallace Stevens, who tried and perhaps failed as much as

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Keats did to create “poetry of imagination” or “supreme fiction.” Like Keats, Stevens valued the imagination of the maker over the rational mind, even though I feel that Stevens, again like Keats, often wrote rational and calculated poems. Keats’ influence and the influence of negative capability cannot be overstated in an existence wherein making rational sense of everyday life, let alone the “big questions,” is nearly impossible.

Robert Archambeau 2: Commodification

About commodification: some people have gone to extremes to keep their work from being chewed up by the culture industry, but in the end real purity (which I’m not so sure is even desirable – words like “purity” make me nervous) doesn’t seem very possible. I mean, think of the people who’ve gone to extremes in trying to avoid being chewed up by the culture industry. There’s a real irony to the fate of the Dada crowd, for example. They started out trying to short-circuit the whole gallery and museum system, doing things like presenting mass-produced objects as art and displaying their work next to axes that could be used by viewers to destroy works they didn’t like. Fast-forward several decades, and the National Gallery of Art is reverently presenting their work. Anyone coming at the exhibit with an axe would be hustled out the door and into a squad car in no time. Or think of Jeremy Prynne, for many years England’s most deliberately obscure poet: for a long time he chose to publish in the most weird little, non-commercial venues, and stayed off the reading and lecture circuits, too. Now you can order up his poems on Amazon.com, he’s being talked about for some of the big prizes, and he’s a star in China, where one of his recent books sold 50,000 copies. In the end, the big cultural institutions devour whatever they want. I suppose we might ask whether the institutions are changed in the process. I think there’s something to this. Certainly the boundaries between “mainstream” and “otherstream” seem more fluid than they used to.

Philly Free School: Thug-ism

For the Philly Free School, as a collective, to cut through all the blarneying levels of post-modernity as a construct, we chose a tack of extremity, extreme disobedience. We embraced what we felt was enlightened elitism/classicism, expressed with edges left in of doubt, foreboding, and the ghostly/apparitional presences, historical and contemporary, which accrued to all of us as we ploughed through the Aughts in Philadelphia. It’s not just that, as has previously been stated,

and as would require extraordinary strength, we skipped intermediate steps from post-modern comic auto-destruct modes to our own version of centuries-encompassed-from-America apotheosis. The lot of us, individually and together, were little thugs, and, in an ironic fashion, the "thug" image of Philadelphia in the American press (derived, mainly, from the press's derisive desire to cover the whole city and environs with or in South Philly) does work for P.F.S. Elitist/classicist/*thug-ism*— that's a new one for the American art scene to deal with, and one which (to my knowledge) has never been seen in America before, wide safety nets be damned. Some of the resultant work started from the avant-garde, some did not, at a time when post-modern art was itself becoming traditional and conservative.

Dovetailing with this, it needs to be said, for those who care— despite the motherload of second-world consonant, socio-sexual and socio-aesthetic freedoms bestowed on us in Aughts Philly, the landscape we inhabited was not without violence. That's one constituent level of the P.F.S. aesthetic which should make New York cringe, whether they then opt to turn away ("lock-down") or not— the edge expressed around carnality, where sex and death manifest simultaneously, and the urgency around carnality and its contexts carries with it darkling undercurrents of physical violence, murder, mayhem, and the dissolution of boundaries which renders these things discrete. The razor's edge approach to sex, and drugs, was one not unfamiliar to all of us, including Mary, Matt, Abby, and Jenny too, from PAFA to the Highwire and back. Not a daffodil in the pack. And academic entanglements, which were real, be damned nonetheless.

If I stand like a thug behind our collective *thug-ism*, it's because the elitism/classicism built into our creations' formality and formal renderings in general lends the entire P.F.S. enterprise a solid, hard-won surface of elegance and starkly imaginative gorgeousness. Gorgeousness, it would have to be said, in a new mode, unseen in the United States before. Gorgeousness, also, that may prove to be crucial for the survival of the cultural United States, especially on the Continent. We are, in fact, the pioneers (pioneering *thugs*) who took indigenous American art to a higher plateau, competitive & commensurate with classicist Europe for the first time. Po-mo, in theory & practice, is a third-world dungeon (killer of the *individual*) in comparison. So, whoever here elects to butt their heads against our brick walls will probably lose a substantial amount of blood. The whole broke-down would-be alienation of P.F.S. on the East Coast might be a joke, too (and on us), if we weren't also funnier, more human than the semi-serious po-mo joke *anti-art/junk-art* crew, who (their master narrative runs) make us laugh to ourselves in our despair, or make us laugh now to despair later. They may have to face a long-term socio-historical prognosis of cat-calls and thrown tomatoes, from a Campbell's soup can (an eternity of *nothing special*) or not. We were, and remain, classicists with pistols; a terrible,

and necessary, breach of the American art status quo. A status quo which, it must be remarked, has remained delimited, provincially, by the country's borders. Europe has not, up to this point, noticed much. This group are the right, well-rounded catalysts to change all that, and Philadelphia the right city, from its architecture on out.

Another important level of awareness, for those interested in P.F.S., and the unique congeries of contexts around us, socially and sexually— P.F.S., and, in fact, all the major Philadelphia Renaissance sectors, were as completely and totally *street* as we could possibly be. We weren't watching Philly street-life from the sidelines and taking notes— most of us spent most of the Aughts on the front-lines. By the time I wrote *Apparition Poems*, the vitality of Aughts Philly street-life was receding into entropy and atrophy— this was particularly true for Abby— but the book, nonetheless, is a reaction to a decade spent living *in the street*, as it were— and doing so by maintaining at least some thug-level street-smart survival skills, against the dealers, impostors, and clowns who perpetually threatened me, and us. Not to say that Jenny and Abby, in particular, were not forced to compromise themselves and their work to stay street-solvent. The ecstasy we caught in the early-Aughts Philly streets turned bitter by the close of the decade. Street-life can be stingy on ways out, while solid work takes its sweet time to manifest in the world.

In fact, given how tight some selected restraints can be on Philly street-life, it is amazing to me that we were granted a solid decade to play around in. I did feel, especially in the early Aughts, a sense of being personally charmed— that when I walked and rode the Philly streets, a beneficent cosmic force was covering me, encasing me in a kind of shield— nothing could hurt me or touch me unless I wanted it to. I was young, of course, and (possibly) wrong— but standing at the corner of 13th and Ellsworth in South Philly at 2 am, or walking home at dawn from Nemon Buckery's Halloween party on 49th Street to 21st and Race, that sense of being guarded was acute. Abs, Mary, Matt, Jeremy, Jenny (not to mention Mike Land) all seemed to feel the same way— and we would hit the streets, go anywhere and do anything. Had we not been *thugs*, or at least partly carried ourselves as such, I'm sure someone would've killed us, before we began; and there's nothing *soft* about our body of work, either.

Philly Free School: Class, more

About P.F.S. and class— most of us were raised middle-class. The European classicism we espoused, as one component part of our collective aesthetic, does leave us open to accusations of bourgeois interest and prejudice. A hard-line Marxist would have to say that any form of aesthetic classicism is inherently bourgeois. But our

demonstrable downward class mobility, inverts this— none of us inherited a serious amount of money, and we all lived hand to mouth in Philly in the Aughts. We were authentically Bohemian— not ashamed, and materially compelled to work retail jobs and occasionally starve. Our bourgeois (suburban, also, for Mary and I) roots were partially betrayed, and the whole catalogue of our carousing exploits had to happen in this context— the magic of Aughts Philly was that we earned our stripes gracefully and unselfconsciously. We were meant to be lapsed suburbanites, lapsed bourgeoisie. Adaptation to city life was no strain for us.

During the years we spent bar-hopping, money for drinks made for an empty fridge at home. If I wanted a midnight snack, it would have to be, often, bread and water. Not to mention that I met Abby and Mary, Mike Land and Nick Gruberg from working retail at the Rittenhouse Square Barnes and Noble in Center City.

Material perks came in and out of our lives— when Abby, Mary, and Jenny were attending PAFA in the early Aughts, each was allotted a personal studio. They could both work and crash there. I spent many nights with Mary in her studio, with its checkered linoleum floor and huge bay windows, on Cherry Street. She had a pull-out couch. After PAFA, the trio maintained co-op studio spaces, but never a completely self-run personal studio again. Mary favored co-ops on the edge of North Philadelphia, as is seen in *The Fall*.

All of us had good luck with people throwing drinks and drugs at us. The communal vibe in Aughts Philadelphia was very intense; if you were on the inside, and had something worthwhile to offer sexually, socially, or artistically, everyone was encouraged to share their goods and services. This was especially important for Mary, who was not just a pot-head but a fully fledged pot addict. One truly surprising thing about Aughts Philly is that all the different sectors maintained their own classicist ethos— **The Philadelphia Independent** offered their classicist form of quirky urban hipster journalism; the **Making Time** DJs were as classicist as they could possibly be about what they played; and then us. Sharing your intoxicants expressed complicity with both this gestalt sensibility and the will to get trashed beyond it. Classicism, and willful individualism, on the razor's edge.

Most of us, in Philadelphia in the Aughts, felt an acute sense of being "in" something. I did, but was circumspect about it, and about expressing this "in" from the inside, because I was only intermittently confident that anyone would ever notice us. Owing to a stable, secure body of artistic work having issued from Neo-Romanticism, I have more confidence now. This confidence is a compensation for the intense socio-cultural aridity and lethargy of the recessional Teens, as the Twenties take wing.

Abs and I were two of the less political Free School artists. I tended, for instance, to avoid the strong strain of political radicalism and activism which ran persistently

through the American literary avant-grade. There were thus obvious levels on which I could not grandstand or flag wave. Politics, I still feel, tends to be too in the moment, of the moment; it exaggerates even further the now-mindedness of avant-garde literary practice. For myself, I felt that the variegated life I was leading made its own kind of statement in Aughts America, and I'm sure Abs would say the same, possibly with more emphatic force, owing to gender and "queer" issues, which have as much permanent relevance as anything else, and just as staunch feminist principles stand implicitly behind everything Mary and Jenny did, too.



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